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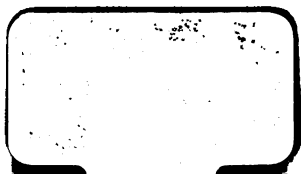
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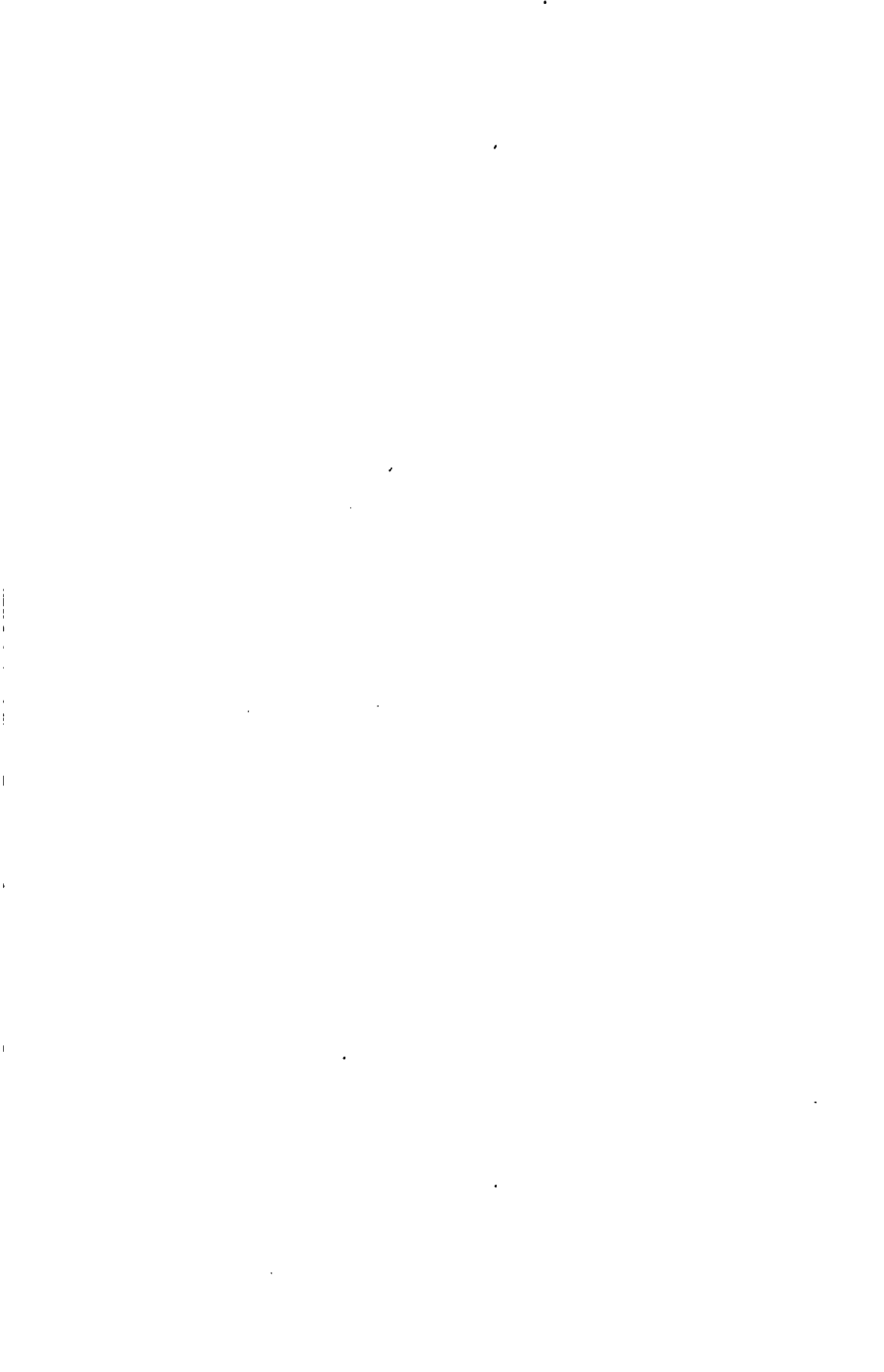
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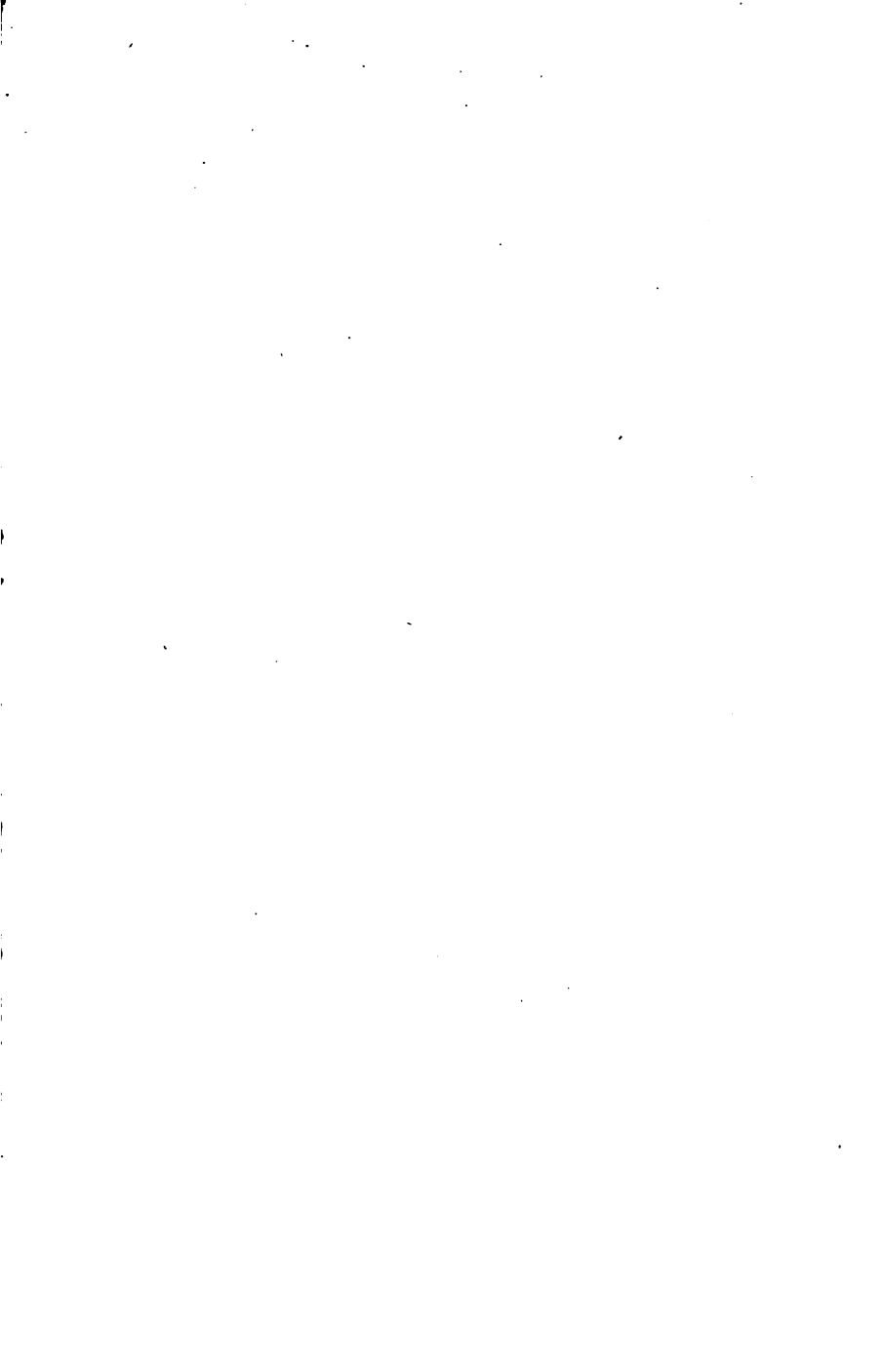
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THE
CHRONICLES OF CASTLE CLOYNE.



THE CHRONICLES OF CASTLE CLOYNE;

OR,

PICTURES OF THE MUNSTER PEOPLE.

BY

M. W. BREW,

AUTHOR OF "THE BURTONS OF DUNELM."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, LIMITED.

1885.

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256. e. 1497.



CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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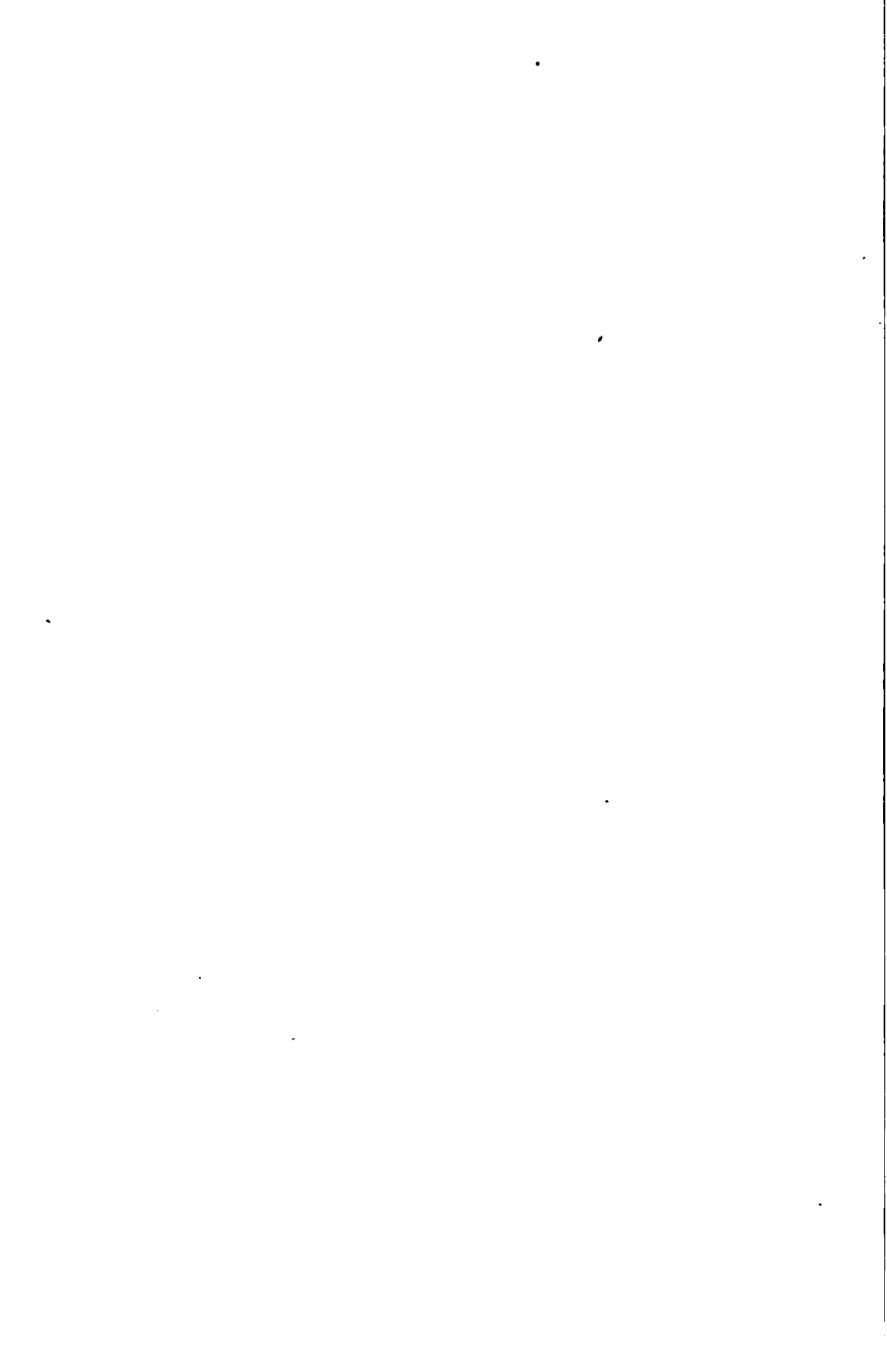
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THE CHRONICLES OF CASTLE CLOYNE.

CHAPTER I.

PAT FLANAGAN BRINGS HOME THE NEWS.

"Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown more than your enemies."

SHAKESPEARE.

As soon as the slips of printed paper announcing the resignation of Mr. Egglestone had been issued from the press, Mr. Pat Flanagan, taking care to provide himself with one of those precious documents, left the town without any further delay. He walked, or rather ran—and Pat was reckoned to have the fleetest foot in Castle Cloyne—for about a mile until he came to the house of his cousin, where he had slept since leaving home, and where he had left his master's horse. He had his own motive for making such haste out of the town—a great piece of self-denial on his part, for it was expected that great fun and amusement would take place there

in the evening. He was resolved on being the first person who should announce the good news of his triumphant return to Mr. Dillon, and he hoped that on this account he would be forgiven for his gross disobedience. Not only had he gone to the election without leave, but he did so in defiance of his master's positive commands to the contrary, and by way of still more aggravating his offence, he had taken with him the very best horse in the stables. There were twelve Irish miles to be got over before he could reach Castle Cloyne, but he knew Tearaway well, and what he was capable of doing when put upon his mettle. Twelve miles would be a trifle to the good steed that had often carried his master forty miles without food or drink.

When he came to his cousin's house, he found no one there but an old woman and some children, for all the rest of the family had gone to town for the fun of the election, and had not yet returned.

"Did Tearaway get a feed ov oats to-day?" he asked the old woman, as he was putting on saddle and bridle.

"Throth, an' he did so. The little gossoon gave it to him no more than a couple ov hours ago. It was the last word his father said to him lavin' out the house this mornin', to be sure to give Tearaway

a good feed ov oats in the middle ov the day, for that you'd go home airly."

"That's all right. Now, Tearaway, 'a *coppal dheelish*,* you must show me that that feed ov oats wasn't put into a bad skin. Your grandam did a good turn onct for my father an' mother, an' you must folly her example to-day an' do a good turn for me."

"Won't you ate a bit, Pat, before you go?" said the woman, on hospitable thoughts intent, laying her hand on his shoulder. "The praties are bilin' on the fire widin, an' we'll have the dinner while a cat would be washin' her 'air. Be sed by me an' take share ov what's goin'."

"No, thank you, Biddy; I couldn't stop if it was the best roast an' biled that was ever laid on the table in the parlour of Castle Cloyne, an' I needn't go beyant that. I'm obleeged to you all the same; but if I'm not the first to bring the good news to the ould masther, I may as well look out for another place. Begor, 'tis my walkin' paper I'll get in wan hand, an' what wages is comin' to me in the other. I'm tellin' you the thruth, the same as if I had my hand on the blessed vestments."

* 'A *coppal dheelish*—My darling horse.

"Alliloo! Is that the way ov it? Faix then, I'd be long sorry to say a word that would delay you. But sure, though you can't wait for the dinner, you can take a glass ov sperits. That won't take long."

She ran back to the house, and brought out a small bottle of whiskey and a wine-glass, the shank of which had been broken off. Pat drank the whiskey she poured out for him in one gulp, touched the horse lightly with the butt-end of his whip, and calling out "good-bye" to the woman, he set off at a rattling pace.

"Good-bye an' good luck!" she bawled out after him; but Pat was already almost out of hearing.

The good horse did not disappoint the expectations of his rider, or give the lie to his own name, for he tore away at a speed that soon left the farmer's house far behind. He was fresh after a few days' idleness, and, fortified by the good feed of oats, he stretched himself to his task willingly and bravely. He flew past one milestone after another, with the speed of an animal well accustomed to the hunting field. Pat got quite exhilarated, partly from the glass of whiskey and partly from the quick motion, and his courage rose as he approached home, remembering the good news of which he was the bearer.

Sometimes he passed a person, or group of persons, who cried out to him eagerly: "Welcome home, Pat! What news from the election?" To which he would reply with a shout of joy: "Good news! good news! The ould stock for ever!" or some such cheery and triumphant answer. But he never drew bridle or slackened his speed until he found himself at the gate of Castle Cloyne. Here he found Tony Fitzgerald lingering about to try if he could see anyone returning from the town, who could tell him how the election had gone. As soon as Pat saw him he sprang from his horse, and, throwing him the bridle, told him with a great air of patronage "to walk Tearaway up an' down gintly for a start, before he was brought into the stable, for that he was in a great hate intirely."

"Faix, you may sing that same if you have the air ov it," replied the old groom. "Wisha, bad luck to your brazen impidince; see what a lather ov foam you brought home the crayther in. Oh, tare an' 'oun's! what a state you have him in, you rale limb ov the divel! an' that's the only name that's fit for you."

"Oh, Tony, there's no harm done, an' the horse will be all right in a couple ov hours' time. As soon as ever I see the masther, I'll come back straight, an'

spind the whole night rubbin' him down," said Pat, now a good deal frightened by the old man's manner.

"Begor, thin, you have no bisniss in life facin' him, an' I wouldn't advise you to do it. He was just like a mad bull when he hard you went off, an' brought the horse wid you; an' what'll it be now, when he sees the state you brought him back in? Oh, the sorra dhrop will be left in your carkiss! Oh, you misfortunate boy, bad as you are, I can't help feelin' pity for you!"

"Erra, lay me alone, Tony Whigarald," cried Pat, trying to pluck up courage, and put a bold face on the matter. "Lay me alone, I tell you. 'Tisn't anything you say that's giving me any throuble at the present, for I have very weighty things on my mind. Where's the masther?"

"If you're advised by me, honest boy, you won't go next nor nigh him. Anyway, wait till Masther Hy'cinth an' Misther Macnamara come home; they may beg you off, an' 'pon my conscience they'll have enough to do. Tell me your news, an' I'll bring it to him."

"An' who'll be the fool thin, Tony? I tell you that cock won't fight. Where is he, I say?"

"Oh, have it your own way, thin. He's below on the lake wid Miss Granua, an' you may go to him av

you like, an' see the sort ov welcome he'll give you. But don't go an' say that *I* didn't give you fair warnin'. That I may never die in sin! but he's gone afther all that I said to him, the born divel that he is! Fake an' sure, he's his father's son, every rope's length ov him!" ejaculated the old man in the greatest amazement.

Undeterred by Tony's gloomy prognostics, Pat rushed past him, and ran as fast as he could down the path that led to the lake. Mr. Dillon and his daughter were in a little boat that she had learned to manage with no little skill, and to paddle about the lake in it on fine evenings was one of her chief pleasures. Now, when she saw a person flying towards them at full speed, she knew that whoever it was, he must have come with decisive news of the election, so she pulled her little skiff in towards the bank, so that they might the sooner hear the news.

When Pat arrived at the side of the lake he never even stopped, but half-mad with joy and excitement he dashed into the water headlong, and flinging his strong young arms round Mr. Dillon, raised him from the bench where he sat, and carried him to the shore as easily as if he were only a child. When he set the bewildered old gentleman on his feet, he began

dancing and capering around him as if he had suddenly gone mad.

"Your honour can stand on your own ground agin, sir, an' walk the counthry in the face ov day," he burst out, "without as much as 'by your lave' to the Sheriff or the bailiffs—the divel's luck to the whole blasted crew ov 'em!"

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful, outrageous conduct?" exclaimed Mr. Dillon. "Quit my presence, you rascal! How dare you show your impudent face where I am?"

"It manes, Mr. Dillon, sir, that you're the mimber for the county, an' no thanks to any wan for that," snapping his fingers. "Sure the spinnin' man gave in whin he found the day was goin' agin him intirely, an' that he hadn't as much as a leg to stand on. Begor, 'twas himself that was well bate, an' why shouldn't he? Sure he never had the ghost ov a chance agin your honour an' Masther Hy'cinth, to say nothing at all of Father John an' Misther Macnamara. 'Tis the thruth I'm tellin' you, sir, an' sure if you won't b'lieve myself, you'll b'lieve that bit ov paper that was wrote with the High Sheriff's own hand, an' printed o' purpose to sind to you, sir. Masther Hy'cinth gev it to me himself. 'Pat,' ses he, 'ride for your life, an' bring that slip ov paper

home to my father,' ses he, 'an' don't let the grass grow undher your feet. 'Tis very well that you thought ov bringin' Tearaway wid you here,' ses he, 'for there isn't another horse in Ireland ground that could carry you aiquil to him,' ses he. 'I'm sure my father is a thrifle displased wid you for comin' here without lave,' ses he, 'but tell him wid my love an' duty, that I hope he'll overlook this little faut for the sake ov the good news I'm sindin' you wid. I'd go home an' tell it all myself to him,' ses he, 'only that I must stay here to-night to be discoorsin', an' makin' manners, for the gintlemin that backed us up, an' wor good frinds to us,' ses he."

During this harangue, delivered with great volubility and gesticulation, Mr. Dillon's anger had been gradually melting away, as Pat very well knew it would.

"Pat Flanagan, you are a desperate liar," he said, trying hard to look very grave and stern, while a smile was breaking over his face; "every word you have said now is a deliberate falsehood."

"Sorra word ov falsehood in it," replied the unabashed serving-man; "I could swear to every word ov it, on all the books in Ireland. Sure your honour can ax Masther Hy'cinth when he comes back, an' if you won't b'lieve him or me, you can't but b'lieve the paper that's in your hand."

The "paper" was there, sure enough, and its contents were too plain and positive to permit of any doubt.

"You must forgive Pat this time, father," said Grace from the boat. "He is very sorry, I am sure, for having displeased you, and remember, he is the first to bring you the good news."

"*Sonuh*er to you, Miss Grace darlin', what you'll be sure to get, wid the blessin' ov God. You're always to the fore to put in a good word for any poor crayther in throuble."

"And, Pat, you're streaming with water, and will get a bad cold, if you don't go at once and put on dry clothes."

"Sure enough, miss, I *am* a thrifle wet," said Pat, looking down at his legs and feet, "but when I saw the masther, sure I couldn't stop myself, nor wait for the little coble to pull in to the shore. Any wan that didn't know me might say I was hearty, but that would be a great lie, for all the lickier that passed my lips this blessed day, since I had a bowl ov tay for breakfast, was wan glass ov sperrits I took at my cousin's before I started for home; that surely wouldn't make a man hearty, an' be this cross"—and here he laid one forefinger across the other—"that's all I had in the way ov lickier this day."

"I suppose you brought my horse back to me nearly dead?" said Mr. Dillon.

"Arrah, what was to kill him? Sure it isn't a dozen miles ov a gallop in the cool ov the evenin', wid myself on his back, that he's used to, an' that knew how to manage him. Sure yourself often rode him at a hunt for three times as far without ever pullin' bridle, and brought him home aftherwards as fresh as a daisy. Wishah, sir, I'm surprised at you to be talkin' that a way, ov a horse that hasn't his aiquil betune this an' Galway."

"Well, be off with you, and let me have no more of your tricks. Tell Tony Fitzgerald to look after Tearaway, and go change your clothes, and have your dinner, for I suppose you have had no food since morning."

"Thruue for you, sir, I had not. Eyeh! 'twasn't mate or dhrink I was thinkin' ov."

"Well, Pat, though you're one of the greatest rascals alive, you deserve something for bringing home the good news so quickly, and you must have it too," and Mr. Dillon put a half-sovereign into Pat's hand.

"Long life to your honour, sir, an' long may you reign over Castle Cloyne!" cried Pat, as he pocketed the gold piece.

"Be off now, and remember I shall go to the stables after dinner to see Tearaway, and if he is a hair the worse for being in your hands, you will have to go."

"Never fear, sir. I'll give you hand an' word, that when you see the horse in the coorse ov the evenin', his coat will be as smooth an' shinin' as Miss Grace's hair. Now, what more can I say than that?"

Mr. Dillon only laughed at this sally, and went to assist his daughter out of the boat, and Pat scampered off to change his trousers, and get his dinner. When those necessary operations had been performed, he went off to the stables, where, in company with Tony Fitzgerald, he was to make Tearaway fit for his master's inspection. They worked so well, that when Mr. Dillon came in the course of the evening, he professed himself to be quite satisfied with the appearance of his favourite hunter, saying to Tony privately that though Pat Flanagan was cracked—as it was only natural his father's son should be—yet he knew a good horse when he saw him, and had some notion of how he should be treated.

In another week Mr. Dillon, now fully recovered from his recent attack of gout, went off to London

to take his seat in Parliament, and, as a matter of course, his son went with him. His daughter preferred remaining at Castle Cloyne, for, shy and sensitive, and in failing health, she shrank from the noise and turmoil of the great city, for which she knew she was totally unfit. However, she was not alone altogether, for Terry Macnamara, who loved her as if she were his own child, left his lodgings in the village, and came with his carpet-bag and fishing-rod to occupy Mr. Dillon's room during his absence, and be a suitable protector to his daughter. He was not much indoors during the day, but always punctually returned to dinner, and sat with Grace in the drawing-room for the rest of the evening. He was not a very congenial companion for a young girl, but there was a sense of rest and security in his presence and protection, that made her feel greatly at her ease. Being a near relative, he was always quite at home at Castle Cloyne, and in Mr. Dillon's absence acted as its master. The tenants, workmen, and servants were so much accustomed to see him there, that it never occurred to any of them to question his authority, or disobey his commands. He was no restraint on Grace, who always treated him as a member of the family, and made no difference in her occupations or pursuits on his account; and

he, on his part, never intruded on her from breakfast until they met again at dinner, unless when he knew she particularly wished for him.

But even with the sense of security given by the protection of the old man in the house, and frequent visits from Father O'Rafferty, who came to see her as often as he could spare time, Grace Dillon felt very lonely in the absence of her father and brother. She was by no means in robust health, but as she never complained, no one appeared to notice it, but if anyone did, it was put down to the low spirits generated by solitude, and the weary, dull monotony of her life at Castle Cloyne.

She had few acquaintances, and only one friend of her own sex—Miss Wilson, her brother's betrothed wife. But Caroline could hardly be called a friend, in the sense in which we understand friendship. She was too lively, and vain, and fond of amusement, to find congenial companionship in the pale, lonely girl, who was often ailing, and always grave and thoughtful. There was nothing whatever in common between the two, except that they were both young, of the same sex, and at no distant time would be connected by a nearer and more affectionate tie. However, the prospect of that connection was not looked upon by either with very pleasurable feelings

or anticipations, for each knew that she was in all respects unlike the other, and consequently that there never could be much real confidence between them.

There are many women like Grace Dillon. They are not beautiful in person, nor brilliant in conversation, nor attractive in manner, and those negative qualities are all cardinal sins in the opinion of the world, and for which they must suffer a heavy and life-long punishment. It seems unjust, but it is nevertheless the universal law, to which the only exception is the possession of either rank or wealth. These two are the great beautifiers, and like charity they cover a multitude of sins, not only of the negative kind, but also of those that are more positive and pronounced. But our kind mother Nature has many compensations in her gift, and if she is niggardly of outward favours, she gives the inward ones with a free and generous hand. Very often the plain face covers a heart that contains a world of love—dormant, it may be, because no one has ever taken the trouble to waken it into life—under the shy, unattractive manner is hidden a sensibility so keen that it vibrates, to the mere sound of a loving word, quivers to the touch of injustice, and is for ever yearning for affection, and grateful

for the few crumbs of kindness that so rarely fall to its lot. It is not surprising that such natures are reticent and shy. With hands stretched out, and hearts full of love, they are repelled at all points, their feelings wounded in the cruellest manner, and invariably obliged to give place to those who, in all things except good looks or showy manners, are vastly their inferiors. Their claims to any consideration are ignored with a hard coarseness, and they are perpetually reminded, either by words, or by a contemptuous silence that can be made as galling and insulting as any words, of their real or apparent inferiority. No wonder that such women are shy, and nervous, and silent. They have no barrier wherewith to protect themselves from the cruel injustice of which they are the victims, but the veil of proud reserve which they wrap round their wounded feelings and bleeding hearts. Woe to such as these who live in this hard world; but a double woe to them, if in it they must eat the bread of dependence—a bread that, even under the most favourable conditions, must be always unspeakably bitter! I doubt if, after all, Nature's compensations are the wisest and the best. Why should an affectionate nature be given to a woman, who must live and die without love? Why is she to be endowed

with sensibility, when her feelings are to be so often outraged? Why should neglect, or injustice, or simple toleration at best, be her portion, because she is neither beautiful, nor brilliant, nor rich? It is a problem hard to solve, and never likely to be solved anywhere but in the Land "where all the hills shall be brought low, and all the crooked paths be made straight."

There are Cordelias in common life, as well as in that enchanted land in which the divine Shakespeare reigned supreme. Never did the great master show his marvellous knowledge of human nature so much, as when he painted the exquisite picture of the misunderstood and disinherited daughter of the short-sighted, mad old king.

CHAPTER II.

OONAGH GETS AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

Oh, weary heart! that must within itself
Close all its deepest leaves.

L. E. L.

DURING the first days of her bereavement, Oonagh was so stunned by her great sorrow, and so bewildered by the weight of care and responsibility thrown on her by her father's death, that she felt as if she were in a trance, without the power of thinking or acting for herself. But with one so happily constituted as to possess a sensible, well-balanced mind in a body of the most perfect health, such an abnormal state of existence could not long continue. One of the best and most valuable possessions of youth, is its marvellous elasticity. It may bend to the very earth under the force of the storm, yet it cannot remain very long prostrate, but will spring

up again fresh and buoyant as before. The heart and the hope of youth—provided always that they are bucklered by a conscience free from all grievous sin—are equal to face any storm, and gifted with a vitality so intense that it can hardly be destroyed, or even subdued. Only for this glorious dower, how could youth encounter the hard, pitiless world that lies on before it; how endure the trials and the sorrows that are sure to mark its course through life with the regularity of milestones? It is a dower that is, thank God! freely and impartially given, for the heart of the youthful peasant in the mud cabin is as elastic and hopeful as that of the heir to wealth and rank. It costs nothing, and it buys everything. It is a fount of unfailing refreshment, a heaven of perpetual sunshine. It is indestructible, immortal, for as long as youth exists upon the earth, the elastic heart that is an integral part of it can never die. The buoyant spirit of youth is Youth itself! Take that away from it, and it becomes age, but with none of the attractions of age. It is age with a smooth brow and bright eyes, but a withered and weary heart; age without its wise experience, its indulgent toleration, its serene and dignified calm.

When the first bitterness of her grief had gone

by, and that she could think of anything outside her great loss, the poor girl's thoughts naturally turned to her lover. She began to wonder why he had never come to show sympathy for her sorrow, or renew his suit, as one who was "handfasted" with her was bound to do. While her father lived, she knew that John Molloy could not come to Ballycross, for the old man had forbidden him to do so in the most peremptory manner. But now, that obstacle existed no longer; she was her own mistress, and accountable to no human being for her actions, and yet "Pleasant John" avoided her as if she lived in a pest-house, and left her, without a word of comfort and sympathy, to her loneliness and sorrow. At first, though surprised and deeply grieved, she was very patient, and in her heart made many excuses for him. She remembered that he had come in for the possession of his brother's farm, and must have many things to take up his time and attention so completely, that he could not manage to make her even one hurried visit. But though love made this excuse, common sense—of which Oonagh possessed no small share—whispered that even if he could not come, he might have written, or sent her a kind, loving message to bid her be of good cheer, for that he had not forgotten her. Neither letter nor message came,

and her heart, in addition to all her other troubles, was sick with the great anguish of hope deferred. He was in good health, for she had heard that he was seen very much about lately; from one, that he had been at such a fair, and from another, that he was flirting away with every girl who was supposed to have a good fortune, either in money or land. But it was never told her, that he was seen dangling after a poor girl, no matter how good or handsome she might be. Shawn Sugagh was now a rich man, and they who knew him best all agreed in thinking that in choosing a wife, he would require to get "penny for penny." Not for a moment did Oonagh believe a word of this gossip, for her faith in her lover was very great. Still she could not help thinking that it was very strange he never came near her now, never even inquired for her, that she could hear of. What could it possibly mean?

But at last it began to dawn upon her mind—slowly at first, indeed—that he shunned her of set purpose, with a view to get out of the solemn engagement into which he had entered with her. The embarrassed state in which her father had left his affairs was by this time tolerably well known. In fact it could no longer be concealed, and Mrs. Clancy in her anger had done nothing but tell it to all her

friends, who in their turn made it public enough. Oonagh herself—as true and open as the day—never denied that she owed a year’s rent, which, without stock on the land, or any capital to draw upon, she could hardly hope to pay. On the other hand, John Molloy had got rich in the same proportion as she had got poor, and evidently he did not care to marry a girl whose small inheritance, deeply encumbered as it was, was not now of much value in his eyes. He would not come courting her any more; that was plain. There was no fear that he would not get a wife, and a rich one too; and she on whom his choice would fall, would no doubt esteem herself, and be esteemed by all other women, as most fortunate and happy.

A woman can forgive every sin in her lover except meanness. He may be wayward, passionate, exacting, and she will bear with it all; he may be even unfaithful, and that too she will forgive, though her heart be sorely wounded, if he will only return to her, and profess repentance for his disloyalty. But meanness, no true woman either will or can forget. Love will struggle on through a long course of unkindness, neglect, and brutality, but meanness kills it with one blow.

“My father was wiser than me, an’ he knew John

better, an' he warned me agin him, many and many a time," said the poor girl to herself. "He often told me that if I married that man he'd break my heart before long, an' I'm thinkin' 'twas thrue for him. I loved him dearly, an' I love him still, *foreer*! But so itself, I must try to put him out ov my head, an' forget him as he forgets me. He needn't be the laste in dhread that I'll be follyin' him, or huntin' after him to remind him that we wor handfasted together, now that he likes to throw it over his shoulder. He may go coortin' where he likes, an' marry who he likes; 'tis all aiqual now to Oonagh."

But though bitterly grieved and mortified, Oonagh was not the girl to sit down to shed tears of idle and unavailing regret. She was too active-minded for that, as well as too proud and well-principled. Having no one to manage her business for her, she was obliged to do it herself, and look her difficulties steadily in the face, in order to surmount them, if it could be done. But all her considerations ended in her coming round to the point from which she had started: she should sell her interest in the farm. When her determination was made known, there was no lack of people willing to become the purchasers. The land was good, though just then somewhat neglected and out of heart; the house comfortable

and in fair repair; the rent was moderate, with a good lease, and held under a good landlord. Under such favourable conditions a purchaser was soon forthcoming in the person of a rich old farmer, who wanted to provide for his eldest son, and set him up in life on his own account. He paid her a tolerably good price, considering that the times were not very good, and she found that after paying all her father's debts, there was a surplus of about twenty pounds left of the purchase money. This she lodged in the bank as a little reserve fund, that was to be left lying by, for sickness or any other unforeseen trouble. Her furniture was taken at a valuation by the person who had bought the land, and what she got for it was sufficient to pay the wages of her two old servants, as well as a small present she made them on parting.

And now the last evening was come; the last that Oonagh was ever to spend in the old house where she was born, and that she never again would call *home*. With the exception of her father's dog, that lay asleep on the hearthstone, there was no living creature in the house but herself. Her servants had left her in the morning, the old man to go into another place, and Molly to go to a niece, who lived some miles away, and had offered her a home. It was March, and the day had been wild and

wet. The wind howled and moaned round the house, and though it had an eerie and mournful sound, yet it *was* sound of some sort, and it was better, she thought, than the deep silence that since morning had weighed her down with a nameless terror. But as the evening wore on the wind went down, though the rain still continued. She had her frugal supper, and then fed her dog, remembering sadly how many living creatures she was accustomed to give food to, in the good old times that were gone for ever. Then she tried to banish thought by cleaning up the kitchen, and cording the little trunk that contained her small stock of clothing. When at last there was nothing more to be done, and night was drawing on apace, she made down a fresh fire, and sat by its cheerful blaze for the last time.

The thoughts of the poor lonely girl as she sat there, were very sad and bitter. Old memories came crowding to her heart, old voices that would never sound on earth again came ringing in her ears. The love that had never failed her, that had stood the test of summer's sunshine and winter's cold, that had borne the heat and burden of the day, had been taken from her, and she had now no staff to lean on but her own good conscience,

and stout heart. When night came round again she would be houseless, and standing face to face with the world, from whose hard contact she had hitherto been so carefully and so lovingly shielded. But come what may, her father's debts were paid, his memory unspotted, and her own hands clean, and her soul, full of calm courage and self-reliance, was ready for whatever fate Providence might appoint it.

After some time her musings were interrupted by the entrance of a visitor. The new-comer was Mr. Dillon's "boy," Pat Flanagan, who was well known to be one of Oonagh's most ardent admirers, but who, notwithstanding the stock of assurance and conceit with which nature had abundantly gifted him, had hitherto "never told his love." With all his confidence, he could never lose sight of the fact that he was only a servant earning his yearly wages, while she was a rustic heiress. She had, however, always some suspicion of the nature of his feelings towards her, for what woman—even the least vain and self-conscious—can ever remain long ignorant of such a fact?—but she had given her love away, and she did not pretend to see a regard to which she could make no return. All she had to give to any man but John Molloy was kindness and good will.

Oonagh rose from her seat, and met her visitor with an outstretched hand and a smile of welcome. She wiped the dust from a chair with her apron, and then motioning him to take it, she resumed her own at the opposite side of the hearth. For some time they sat looking at each other in silence, she calm and self-possessed, as she always was, and he, for once in his life, silent and embarrassed, leaning his elbows on his knees, and turning his hat round and round between his hands in dumb and bashful confusion.

"I suppose you wor comin' home from the fair, and turned in to see the old house before the new people come into it," she said, breaking the silence. "It was a kind and a neighbourly thing, Pat, an' like what you'd do; for I was all alone here, wid no wan to keep me company but poor Bran."

"Well, I knew that, Oonagh; and it was it made me turn in off the road. Ould Tony Whigarald an' myself wor at the fair, an' on the way home he wint off to the wake ov a woman ov the Murphies up at Poulbeg, an' I turned in here, knowing you'd be all alone, in regard ov all the nabours about here bein' at the corp house."

"I am very thankful to you, Pat. As you came straight from the fair, sure you must be lost wid

the hunger. I'm sorry that I have no better to offer you than bread and milk; but sure you're as welcome to it as if it was the fine supper that's waitin' for you in Castle Cloyne."

"Don't give yourself any throuble about it, Oonagh. I ate something in Dan Leahy's tent before I left the fair."

"So itself. There's many a good long step betune this an' the fair place. Don't refuse me, Pat," she continued, with a slight tremble in her voice, and a tear glistening in her eye; "for it is the last time that I can ever ax any wan to break bread in my poor father's house."

To please her he pretended to make use of the simple fare she placed before him; but it was only a pretence.

"I couldn't eat it, Oonagh asthore! for there's a big lump in my throat a'most chokin' me. Don't ax me."

She put away the food in silence, and then sat down again. She could not trust herself to speak, for the honest sympathy of the poor fellow had gone to her heart.

"I hard over at the fair place that you sould the place, an' wor lavin' it for good. Is that thrue?"

"It is, Pat. I had no other way ov payin' my

father's just debts, an' clearin' his name, that was ever an' always known to be honest. It goes very hard on me to part wid the ould place, but I may as well part it dacently, than to have the sheriff dhrive me out ov it, an' no thanks to me into the bargain."

He made no reply, but kept turning his hat round still more rapidly than before.

"There isn't a bush on this land that I don't love," she went on. "I love every stick ov the ould furniture, as if they wor all alive, an' had a feelin' for me. I always knew that I'd be heart sorry to part 'em, but I never knew till now how great my grief would be at the last. But sure I lost what I thought worse ov than the few *brelawns*,* an' I have to be satisfied, or thry to be so. But wan thing I know well, an' 'tis that wherever I go, or whatever becomes ov me, I'll never agin be as happy as what I was here."

"Did you ever hear tell ov my uncle, Luke Flanagan, Oonagh?" he said suddenly. "He wint to America to seek his fortune, before ever I was born, or my father an' mother married."

"Ov coorse I did. My father an' he wor great

* *Brelawns*—Old, worthless furniture.

comrades intirely, when they wor both gorsoons, an' many's the laugh he had, tellin' ov all the wild pranks they used to play together. He used to say that you took afther him greatly."

"Well, Oonagh, my uncle Luke is dead, God rest his soul! He got on grandly in America afther a little while, an' made a power ov money. Afther he got rich, he wrote for me to go out to him though he never even saw me, but you see my poor father was his only brother. Over an' over he wrote for me, offerin' to pay my passage, an' do well for me as if I was his own son."

"An' why didn't you go, Pat? It was a great chance surely, an' there isn't a boy in Castle Cloyne that wouldn't jump at it, barrin' yourself."

"Well, for one why, I was very comfortable in Mr. Dillon's house, an' had a'most as good a life there as his own son, only that he ate his vittles in the parlour, an' I ate mine in the kitchen. The masther was very good to my poor father an' mother, when all the world turned agin 'em, an' whin they died, an' left me behind 'em without a male's mate or a *laffina** to buy it, he took good care ov me, an' never let me know what cold or hunger wor. I

* *Laffina*—A halfpenny.

was his own man since I grew up, an' the thought ov lavin' him ga' me a lonesome feelin' that I couldn't get over. That's wan why. Another why is, that Masther Hy'cint' an' myself is ov wan age; we grew up together, an' I love him as if he was my own brother. It would take all the money that's in America, to make me go where I'd never see his face agin. An' there's another why, but that's neither here nor there; maybe you know yourself what it is, though I never had the courage to tell it to you. Anyhow, my uncle died three months ago in America, an' he left me three hundred pounds in his will!"

"Oh, Pat dear, I'm so glad!" exclaimed the girl, while her face that had been so sad a while ago, was now lighted up by joyous smiles. "But are you sure ov it?"

"Here's the letther from some man in the same place, that's executor to the will. I only got it a while ago on my way home from the fair, when I wint to the post office, to ax if there was any commands for the masther or any ov the family. It is directed to me to the masther's care, an' it reads as if it was all right, an' no mistake in life about it. You can see for yourself," and he handed it to her, with the post-mark of New Orleans on the cover.

"It seems to be all right," she said, when she

had read it; "an' there's no fear but you'll get the money. Oh, Pat dear, you're a made man for ever."

"'Tis a power ov money, surely," said Pat reflectively. "Anyway, 'tis a power to a poor boy like me, wid no back but my year's wages. Now, Oonagh *asthore machree*! can you give a guess why I couldn't go to America, an' what it was that brought me here to-night?"

"I'm a bad hand at guessin', Pat."

The warm blood that mounted into her face, suffusing cheek and brow, told, however, that she knew his meaning right well.

He cleared his throat a couple of times in a perfect agony of bashfulness. At last, making a desperate effort, he blurted out:

"The thruth is best, Oonagh, ever an' always. I came to offer you myself an' my three hundred pound, an' there won't be a happier or a prouder boy on Ireland ground this day, if you will take me at my offer."

Between embarrassment and surprise she was silent; and having broken the ice, he went on again volubly enough:

"I always loved you, darlin', though you never knew it. It wasn't istherday, or the day before that again, but as long as I can remimber; but I never

had the courage to tell you. You were a comfortable man's daughter, an' I was only Mr. Dillon's own man. Well, I knew that the likes ov me was no match for you, an' that if I went to Martin MacDermott for a wife, he'd only laugh in my face. But all the same, I couldn't help myself. I used to folly you about like a fool, an' go to the same mass wid you, though it wasn't at the priest or my prayer-book I was lookin', but at your purty face. An' don't you remimber that whenever you came to see Miss Grace, I was for ever hangin' about the stairs, waitin' till you'd be goin', an' that I could walk down the avenue wid you. Don't you remimber it all, '*a cushla*?' "

Still she was silent, and this gave him courage to go on with more confidence.

"Three hundred pound! Think ov that, '*a chora machree*! The letther says as soon as I sind out a power ov attorney, whatever that manes, that I'll be paid the money. I don't undherstand it, but the masther will manage it all for me. Three hundred pound, an' to be all our own! We'll be as happy, both ov us, as the day is long."

He was radiant with happiness, and his dark eyes lighted up as he gazed on her grave, downcast face.

"But the farm an' everything is all sold," she said at last. "I had to sell every stick an' stone to pay my poor father's debts."

"All that is aisy settled. A hundred pound will pay the debts an' the rint that's due. Yarra, they're not worth talkin' ov. An' then there's a couple ov hundred more to stock the land, an' begin the world agin, as fresh as paint. An' now, what have you to say to me?"

"That you're a good fellow, Pat, an' deserve a good wife; what you'll get yet, wid the blessin' ov God. But that wife won't be Oonagh. I thank you for your love an' frindship, but you must put it all out ov your head. If you had twice the money you have, it would be all the same; I can't marry you, Pat. An' I hope you won't be the worse frinds wid me, for tellin' you the thruth; but 'tis best for both ov us in the long run. You know that I never say wan thing an' think the other," and she looked full at him with those clear, honest eyes of hers, in whose calm depths no deceit had ever lurked.

"Don't say that, '*a hudgeen thael*!*' Ould Tom Dempsy is a dacent man, an' he won't be so mane as to keep you to your bargain, when he hears you

* '*A hudgeen thael*—My share of the world!

have the money to redeem the land. Sure you didn't give him possession at all yet."

"But he has my promise that I'll give it to him to-morrow at twelve o'clock, an' I never broke my word wid anyone yet," she said simply.

"I'll go this very minnit, an' make him let you off. He's a devout, honest man, and whin I insinse him into the rights ov the story, he'll hear to rason ;" and Pat, terribly in earnest, started up, and strode towards the door.

"Come back agin, I bid you, an' sit down," she said, with such decision in her voice and manner that he was obliged to obey her.

"It is you, Pat Flanagan, that must hear to rason now. If you had Castle Cloyne as your own, not to talk of three hundred pound, it would be all the same to Oonagh. How could I marry one man, when I'm handfasted wid another?"

"I hard some little sketch ov that, but I didn't b'lieve it."

"Who told it to you?"

"Oh, 'tis no saycret. I hard it from Shawn Sugagh himself. The blaggard! The mane, dirty blaggard! He was in Dan Leahy's tint to-day, an' he had so much licker taken, that he didn't know what he was sayin'. He was braggin' ov how you

an' he wor handfasted together; but that it was done when he was a bit soft, an' now that he had more sinse, he had no idaya ov follyin' afther a girl that had no fortune but debt. There wasn't a man there that didn't cry shame on him. I ran at him, an' would have given him the best lickin' that ever he got, but they all dragged me away, an' said it wouldn't be fair or manly to strike any wan so far gone in licker. But, all the same, I'll put a mark on the lyin' villyan that he'll carry to the grave, as sure as my name is Pat Flanagan."

It may be imagined with what feelings the poor girl heard this story. The blood rushed to her face in waves of indignant shame, and as quickly receded, leaving it as colourless as if she had been turned into marble.

"I'm sure you're not jokin' wid me, Pat; for it isn't in you to play such an ugly joke on a poor fatherless girl. Though you're a frolicsome boy, there is no ill-nature in you."

"You only give my due there, Oonagh. Whoever I'd play tricks on, it wouldn't be *you*. There was a dale of people hard him as well as me, an' they'll tell you I'm spakin' the thruth."

"I believed you from the very first. I'm sure every word is thrue," she said bitterly, while she

was twisting her fingers together in wild, nervous excitement.

"Don't fret yourself about such a ruffin. Sure no wan that was in it b'lieved a word he said, an' he mad dhrunk besides. Yourself an' myself will be laughin' together at him, wan ov these days, when we're man an' wife, happy an' comfortable. Don't refuse me, Oonagh, '*a graw geál*,'" the poor fellow pleaded, his voice trembling, and all the swagger and impudence quite gone. "Sure I can wait as long as it's plasin' to you. I can hould on at the big house, an' you can stay here, an' manage the farm; an' my hand to you, I'll never come next nor nigh you, till you sind for mé by a slip ov paper wid nothing wrote on it but just, 'Pat, come home to me,' an' if it was at the ind ov twinty years I'll surely come."

"No, Pat, my poor fellow, no. It can never be. I'm not like John Molloy, for I'm the same ever an' always. I divided the sixpence wid him, an' though he broke hand an' word wid me, I couldn't break it wid him. I love him all through, *foreer ! foreer !*" and the poor deserted girl, resting her head on the back of her chair, wept such bitter tears as women rarely shed more than once in their lives, though very sorrowful, in truth, their lives are sure to be.

"I must go away, Oonagh, for I can't bear to see you cryin' like that. Let the land go to the honest man that bought it, as nothing else will satisfy you. There's many another farm on Castle Cloyne estate just as good, an' remimber, darlin', that if ever you change your mind, Pat Flanagan an' his three hundred pound will be both ov 'em to the fore."

He held her hand in a long clinging clasp, while his whole soul went out in pity for the poor fatherless girl weeping before him.

"An' oh! where are you to go, asthore machree?" he cried, still lingering. "How can you face the wide world, or what will you do?"

"I'll get on very well, never fear. As soon as I give possession to-morrow to Dempsy, I'll go on to ould Connor Burke's; he's the father ov Tom an' Shusy, an' a relation ov mine, though not a very near wan. But sure blood is thicker than water, any day. I'll stay wid them till I can get a place, for I don't mane to ate idle bread."

"Never fear you for that, Oonagh. Lave Bran wid me, an' I'll take as good care of him, as I would ov a child."

"Thank you, Pat, for the offer. I'll take it when I get a place, if the people I go to won't let

me keep him. But as long as I can, I'll keep him. I couldn't bear to part my poor ould father's dog, as long as I can help it. When the time comes, I'll send him to you by a sure messenger. You'll be good to poor Bran, Pat, for my sake, an' the sake ov the ould man that always had a welcome for you. An' all I can say is, that I never will let out ov my heart all the feelin' an' kindness that you showed me this night. Good-bye, Pat."

He pressed her hand without a word, and left the house. And now, again alone, Oonagh's tears fell without any restraint. All her woman's love had been scorned, the love that would have willingly given all, and asked for little in return. All her woman's pride had been outraged, the pride that to a modest and virtuous woman is the brightest jewel in her crown. And to put the climax to her sorrow, the following day would see her a homeless wanderer, face to face with the hard world!

Hour after hour of that long, cold night passed away, and still Oonagh sat beside the hearth that in a few hours would be hers no more. The fire went out, and she did not replenish it, and when the pale, chill dawn stole in through the window, she was just where Pat had left her, with the dog crouched down at her feet. Her face was swollen,

and her eyes were red and sore from excessive weeping. It was not for her father she had wept so long and passionately, though he had been to her everything that a loving parent could be to an only child; nor for her home, though everything in and about it was dear and sacred in her eyes. But she had wept for the priceless jewel of her heart's lost love, the love of her youth, its first and its last! She had squandered it away—that "full and perfect chrysolite"—and she could not call it back again, let her wish it ever so much. It was a very sad and dreary vigil that the poor girl kept, sitting as it were beside the grave, where all that had made the gladness and brightness of her life was buried away out of her sight. Youth and home, and the love that was dearer than them all, were lying deep down in that grave, and with the light of the new day she was to go forth into a strange world, and eat henceforth of the stranger's bread!

CHAPTER III.

OONAGH LEAVES HER HOME.

Whither, oh whither, hath the world a home,
The wide, cold world, for heart so lone as mine?

ANON.

AT twelve o'clock the following day, Oonagh, according to her agreement, gave the possession of her house and farm to the farmer who had bought them from her, and then with tearful eyes and sorrowful heart, she took a final farewell of her dear old home. She took nothing with her but a few necessities for immediate use, tied up in a bundle that she carried in her hand. The rest of her clothes were in a trunk that she left to the care of the new tenants, until she would be able to send a messenger for it. She intended walking to the house of Connor Burke, her relative, which was about twelve miles distant, but before doing so, she had two visits to

pay. One was to her father's grave in the neighbouring churchyard, and the other was to Castle Cloyne, to take farewell of her foster-sister, Miss Dillon. She walked on briskly, followed by her dog, and to her great satisfaction did not meet anyone, for it was market-day in the next town, and it was too late to meet those who had gone there in the morning, and too early to meet those who would be returning home. It would have pained her to meet any of her old friends and neighbours on this day of great sorrow, for what comfort could they give her?—and just then she preferred the companionship of her own thoughts, to the conversation of those who did not know how very heavy was her burden. The day was dull and cloudy, as might have been expected after the storm of wind and rain of the previous night, and there was a depressing influence in the chill, damp air for which she was almost glad. Sunshine, and the brightness and beauty that invariably follow it, would, she felt, be too much for her sad, lonely heart at that trying hour.

She was soon in sight of the ruined walls of the ancient church round which

In many a mouldering heap
The rude forefathers of the hamlet slept.

It was in this old graveyard that her father and mother were buried, and she could not endure to leave the country without visiting the grave in which they were sleeping their last sleep together. She was just turning up the *bohreen*, or narrow by-path, that led to it from the road, when she was accosted by a voice whose lowest tones, even still, had the power to thrill through her whole being, and turning round she saw before her the handsome face and tall, well-made figure of her false lover, Shawn Sugagh.

"The top ov the morning to you, Miss Oonagh," he said, with his usual cool impudence. Even taken by surprise as she was, she could not but notice the formal word "Miss" prefixed by him to her name for the first time. "Why, 'tis a thousand years since I had the shuprame pleasure ov seein' you. I little thought when I left home this mornin', that I'd have the mellifluous surprise to come across you during the coorse ov my peregrinations."

"You might see me aisy enough, if you had a mind," she replied simply, "for I never left Ballycross for a long time, barrin' to run off to airly mass on Sundays."

"Well, indeed, I 'must plade guilty to your averment, but I had a dale ov bisness to elucidate

afther my brother's death. I have very little time now to be perambulating through the country, as I used to do when I had nothing to occupy my cogitations but divarshun an' society. I'm a responsible man now, Miss Oonagh, an' have a dale ov work to attind to, an' tillage an' cattle to see afther."

"So I hard. You'll never be half as well off in the world, John, as what I wish you. You may be sure ov that."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" he said, in a very lofty and patronising way. "I knew that your good wishes an' congratulations worn't wantin' to me in my elevation, though there's many envious people in the world that bebridges me my shupariority. But I never misdoubted you, miss, for I always liked you; an' what I liked you most for, was your philanthropy an' your joculariry."

Whatever philanthropy the poor girl might have been the possessor of, there was very little joculariry about her at that moment. She stood before him pale and silent, with her little bundle lying at her feet, with eyes cast down, and lips firmly compressed, lest she should, by look or word, betray any part of the great suffering that surged through her whole being. All her woman's pride rose up to support

her, and to save her from the unspeakable humiliation of letting him see what she felt. He had cast her off coarsely and brutally, and trampled on the unselfish love of her pure virginal heart, but she would not give his vanity the triumph of betraying any emotion. It was a hard struggle for the poor girl, but, like all women who respect themselves and their own sex, she was fully equal to it, and came off the victor. In another moment she looked up at him again with a composed, resolute face, and the calm, soft eyes that never flinched before his gaze.

"I'll be sayin' good-bye to you, John, for I have a long walk before me, an' I want to be at my journey's end before the night falls," she said, with a quietness of tone and manner that only her self-controlled, resolute character was capable of. "But before we part, I must tell you how glad I am at your uprise and good luck, an' I hope that you'll live long to enjoy it. I say this, John, wid all my heart."

"I'm sure I'm obligated to you, miss; the same to you. Every word that you promulgate, finds a recicoprcity in my own heart. I'm very proud indeed to see you so jovial an' odoriferous, for I always had a great regard for you intirely; an'

'tisn't every wan, you persave, that I'd contaminate myself be consortin' wid. You'll allow that there's no great admiration in that; for everywan that has the honour ov my acquaintance, knows my intire shupariory, an' conversity wid all the branches ov polite edication, above all wid the classical construction ov langwidges, an' the humanities, belongin' both to the ould ancients, as well as to the complexity ov modern authors."

It was no wonder that his bishop had peremptorily refused to receive him as a candidate for the priesthood, and that Susie Burke had contemptuously called him a fool!

To this speech, which he evidently considered the perfection of refined oratory, as well as being quite in harmony with his late advancement in life, Oonagh made no reply. He waited for a little while, thinking she would renew the conversation; but she did not, and he began to weary of an interview in which his powers of fascination were so little appreciated. Callous and vain though he was, he yet could not fail to see that he was making a very poor figure in the eyes of a woman, whose chief characteristics were her sterling good sense and simple truthfulness. He felt that whether she still entertained any affection for him or no, that he had

completely lost her respect, and that her eyes were fully opened to the meanness of his conduct, and the unworthiness of his character. Even though determined on breaking every tie with her, still this was a mortifying and unpleasant reflection, and seeing that he could not impose on her any longer, he thought it was high time to terminate their interview. He could bear her resentment, and her reproaches, if she would only express them ; but her cool, silent contempt was too much for him.

“ You must accept, Miss Oonagh, my expostulations for keeping you so long, especially as I’m in dhread that the day will most likely eventuate in rain. I prognosticate, from the obscurity ov the mornin’, that there’ll be a distillation in the afthernoon.”

He then shook hands with Oonagh in quite a condescending manner, and walked away with his usual air of swaggering importance. She turned up the *bohreen* with rapid steps, and making her way to her parents’ grave, she flung herself upon it in an abandonment of passionate sorrow. The tears that she had hitherto suppressed with some success, now broke forth in a hot, blinding rain, while her whole body was shaken by the violence of her sobs.

“ Oh, father, mother, why did ye lave me behind

ye, in this hard, cruel world?" moaned the poor, desolate, broken-hearted creature, "for now I must face it without yer strong arms to protect me, an' yer lovin' hearts to shelter me. *Oh ahir dheelish, váher 'a graw machree, agus m'ánima!** My poor heart is broken, an' there is no wan to spake a kind word to me, no wan to care what becomes ov me, or whether I live or die! Look down from heaven on yer sufferin' child, an' beg ov the good God to have pity on me, an' take me to Himself."

The great violence of her sorrow wore itself out after a time; her sobs became less frequent, and her tears were actually exhausted. She rose from her recumbent posture, and, kneeling down at the foot of the grave, took her beads from her pocket, and recited the rosary for the repose of the souls of her parents with all the steadfast faith, and simple piety of the Irish peasant. This devotional exercise, and the holy thoughts with which it inspired her, calmed her agitated heart, and tended to bring it back in a great measure to its normal state of self-reliance and serene peace. If there were some thoughts to afflict her, there were many others that

* *Oh ahir dheelish, váher 'a graw machree, agus m'ánima!*
—Oh, dearest father, oh mother, the love of my heart, and my soul.

were well calculated to soothe and comfort her, and foremost among them was the consciousness that she had never grieved or disobeyed her parents wilfully, and that in all things she fulfilled their last injunctions, not only in the letter, but in the spirit also. There was balm in Gilead, even for a heart so sorely stricken as hers. She had not grieved her father's soul, or brought down his good gray head to the grave with sorrow, for the sake of the worthless scamp she had just parted from. Now, kneeling beside his grave, she recognised the wisdom with which he had guided and saved her from being the wife of the man, who could treat her as John Molloy had done but an hour ago.

She rose from her knees, remembering that she had a long way to go before night, and bathing her face and eyes in the clear water of a little brook that flowed at one side of the churchyard, she again resumed her journey, and met with no interruption until she arrived at Castle Cloyne. She went to the house by a path through the wood, intended only for pedestrians. On arriving at the house, she went at once up-stairs to Miss Dillon's own parlour without any question asked, for the servants all knew that she was the young lady's foster-sister, and a privileged person in consequence.

Oonagh found Grace sitting by a good fire in her room, reading, and as usual quite alone. Her father and brother were in London, and few visitors came to so remote a place as Castle Cloyne. The foster-sisters had not met for some time, and now each noticed that the other was changed, and not for the better. The health of Grace, never robust, had become much worse since the departure of her father and brother, and left alone without companionship, the poor, lonely girl drooped and faded day by day. The change in Oonagh was not quite so perceptible, for when youth and perfect health go hand in hand, the physique cannot greatly deteriorate. But the gladness and brightness that make the glory of youth were gone. There was no smile on her lips, no light in her eyes, though neither sorrow nor time could rob them of their sweet, candid expression.

"You look sad and weary, my poor Oonagh," said the young lady affectionately, as she made her visitor sit down beside her.

"Are you surprised at that, Miss Grace? I went through a heap ov throuble ov every kind since I saw you last, but, wid the blessin' ov God, 'tis all over now. Nothing can ever happen to me agin, so sorrowful or so hard as what I've put behind my back. I have no more to lose now, barrin' my

life, an' when everything else is gone, what good is life to me, or what pleasure can I have in it?"

"Oh, Oonagh dear, I am surprised to hear such a good, religious girl, as I know you to be, say such a thing as that. Life is the gift of God, and, as such, is not to be under-valued, or made light of. You have health, and that is a great blessing," said Grace, with a sigh.

"I ax God's pardon if I offinded Him, miss, but sure I spoke them words without thinkin' ov myself. The holy will ov God is best always, an' I'm submissive," and here Oonagh crossed herself devoutly.

"If my father were at home," resumed Grace, "I am sure he would forgive you what rent you owed, or at least a great part of it. But the agent was only too glad to get the money, and never told him or me anything about it. If I had known it, I would have written to my father, but you never told me, and it was only yesterday that I heard it by the merest chance. He would have dealt kindly by you, and would not have suffered you to give up your farm."

"So he would, miss. God bless him, an' sind him home safe to his own place, an' his own people! But sure where would be the good? How could I make the rint, without as much as a tail on the land, or any way ov tillin' it, or the price ov the seed

to put down, unless I run in debt for it. I'd be every day sinkin' deeper an' deeper into the mud—wid respects to you, miss. An' above all, I never could pay my poor father's debts, as I promised him that I'd do."

"You are a good girl, Oonagh, and much wiser and more practical than I am. Looking more closely into the matter, I acknowledge that you were right in casting off a burden too heavy for you to bear, and you have obeyed your father's last wishes, and kept his good name without reproach."

"That was what was in my mind all through, an' I had no rest or pace till it was done. Every penny that we ever owed is paid, thank God!"

"That is a most happy feeling to have. And now tell me what are your plans for the future, or if you have formed any. If not, stay here with me for the present. I am very lonely here since my father and brother went away, and Mr. Macnamara, who is staying with me, is out always until evening. My own maid is leaving me, for she is going to be married, and I am sure you could fill her place very well. Or if you don't like taking her situation, you could stay on until you have recovered yourself a little, for you are greatly in want of rest and quietness after all your troubles."

"God spare you your health, Miss Grace! I never doubted your goodness, but I couldn't stay in the parish ov Castle Cloyne at all."

"Why not, Oonagh? You have done nothing that would make you ashamed to remain among your old friends and neighbours, but quite the contrary. If truth, and worth, and integrity, had their proper place, you could compare with the first lady in the land, and that to your own great advantage."

"Oyeh, no, miss. I'm only a poor ignorant girl striving to do my duty, an' I have no call to compare myself wid ladies at all. But I couldn't bear to stay in the place."

"Have you had a quarrel with 'Pleasant John'?" said Grace with a smile, for she had been Oonagh's *confidante* all along.

"We had no quarrel at all," faltered poor Oonagh, "but I got poor, an' he got rich, an' just that's how it is. I wouldn't like to misjudge any wan, an' laste ov all him, but if it isn't that, I don't know what it is."

"He was never worthy of you, Oonagh, and you know I often told you so. Now you know him for what he is, and can estimate him at his proper value. In slighting you, he has 'thrown a pearl away, richer than all his tribe.' I cannot say that I am sorry you

have lost such a heartless, sordid lover. You are well rid of the mean wretch."

"That may be, Miss Grace, but the misfortunate part ov my case is, that I love him all the same. You'll say that I am very foolish an' mane, an' no admiration that you'd say it; sure anyone that would hear the story would say it. But so itself, I can't help it. An' that's why I can't stay in Castle Cloyne, but must go to another parish, where I won't see him at all, or hear people talkin' ov him. I can bear a great dale, but I couldn't bear *that*. It would kill me, Miss Grace, an' that's the whole thruth now for you, the same as if I was in the confessional," and sinking on her knees, she buried her face in the lap of her kind foster-sister, and burst into a perfect storm of passionate sorrow. Grace did not at first reply to this wild outburst, wrung from the inmost core of an outraged heart, but only caressed with her soft hand the head that lay in her lap.

After a little time, when Oonagh was calmer, Grace said to her: "Listen to me, Oonagh, and take comfort from what I say. That man is not worthy of you, whatever glamour he contrived to cast over you. It is well that he has shown himself in his true colours, before you became his wife. What would your life be as the wife of such a man? Death.

itself would be preferable to so dreadful a lot as that."

"You said a while ago, Miss, that I was wiser than you, an' now I can return you the compliment," said Oonagh, wiping away her tears, "for what you say has sinse an' rason in it. But though I was so foolish just now, 'twas becuse my heart was very sore; an' when I saw your face, an' knew how much you felt for me, all the grief an' misery burst out in spite ov me. But sure 'tis only to yourself, Miss Grace, that I'd let it out at all. But you needn't be in dhread," she went on, with some of her old proud spirit, "that I'll ever say or do anything that would make you ashamed of the child ov the woman that nursed you at her breast. If John Molloy was to come back agin to me, an' ax me on his binded knees to be his wife, I wouldn't consint; no, not if he was ten times as handsome an' rich, an' my love ten times more than it is. That's the thruth, Miss, as I'm a livin' woman. But I couldn't stay wid you, nor in the wan parish wid him; my heart is a dale too sore an' troubled yet for that. But when I'm far away in a place where I'll neither see nor hear ov him, I'll thry to put him out ov my mind, an' forget that I ever cared for him."

"You may be right, therefore I won't press you to remain at present. But in some time, when you have got over this foolish infatuation—for I can call it nothing else—you must return to me. Remember, Oonagh, that wherever I am, there is a place for you also. But where will you go now?"

"To a place called Bawnmore, where Connor Burke, a distant cousin ov mine, lives. He goes by the name ov Croohooore Crussough, in regard ov his bein' a little contrary an' cross in himself, when anything vexes him. His wife is a very dacent, quiet woman, an' his daughter Shusy an' myself wor always great comarades. You often hard me talk ov Shusy. They might know ov some place that would shuit me; anyway, I could stay wid them for a while, till I could look about me, an' see what was best for me to do."

"It is not a bad plan at all, and my mind will be at rest when I know you are under the protection of friends. But why not go to your aunt, Mrs. Clancy? Her house is far enough from Castle Cloyne in all conscience, and you would be more sure of a welcome from her than from cross Connor."

"Well, miss, she was so displased wid me for sellin' the land, that she ris out ov me intirely, an'

since my poor father's death, she never axed whether I was alive or dead. I'd sooner go to the Burkes for a short time, till I get a place, an' that'll be as soon as I can, for I never could bring myself down to eat the bread ov idleness on anywan's flure."

"You are quite right, and I would not wish that you should, for the life of a dependant is a very hard one. But remember always, that when you are out of place, there is a home and a welcome for you in Castle Cloyne."

"Long life to you, miss, an' long may you reign there! But the day is passin', and I have far to go."

"But you must not go until you have had something in the way of dinner," said Grace, ringing the bell. In a short time a tray with cold meat, bread, and a bowl of milk was placed on a small table drawn down to the fire, and the poor girl, who had had but a very indifferent breakfast, and had the natural healthy appetite of youth, sharpened by her walk in the open air, made, notwithstanding her grief, a very hearty and, for her, a very luxurious meal. When she had finished, Grace told her to make a parcel of what was left, and put it in her pocket, to eat at the approach of evening.

"I ate a grand dinner, thanks to you, miss, an' I'll want no more till I get to Bawnmore. But, by your lave, I'll take it all the same for Bran, that's waitin' for me at the back dure. He has a long road before him as well as me, an' he's not used to be hungry. So I'll take the vittles for him, if you plase."

Grace made up the fragments of the dinner in an old newspaper, and put the little parcel into Oonagh's hand. Then she kissed her affectionately, and wished her God-speed, and with moist eyes watched her as she went down the path that led out to the public road, followed by her dog.

When Oonagh came to the end of this path, which was shaded by a belt of trees, and felt herself secure from observation, she sat down on a stone, and, opening the parcel, broke the contents into small pieces, and proceeded to feed her dog. It was a long time since poor Bran, like herself, had got so splendid a repast, to which, it need hardly be said, he did ample justice, not leaving behind even a solitary crumb. Then Oonagh prepared for her long walk, by taking off her shoes and stockings, which she tied up in the bundle with her other things. She did this partly from economy, and partly because she knew that she could walk more

lightly and freely without them, than she could possibly do if she wore them. Taking up her bundle once more, she sprang lightly over the stile that separated the shrubbery from the main road, and calling her dog, set out on her walk with as little concern, as if the twelve miles that lay between her and Bawnmore had been only two.

CHAPTER IV.

BAWNMORE.

This farmer hath a sharp and meagre face.
'Tis Death in an undress of skin and bone,
Where age and youth, their landmarks ta'en away,
Look all one common sorrow.

DRYDEN.

THE evening was deepening into night, when Oonagh and her four-footed companion arrived in sight of the farm and homestead of Bawnmore. It was here that Connor Burke, the father of her friend Susie, lived. The house was a good, substantial cottage, pleasantly situated in a valley that was well sheltered by surrounding hills, and the land seemed good, and fairly well cultivated; both together looking as if the owner was a thriving, if not a wealthy man. The evening was getting very chill, for a frost had succeeded to the damp of the early part of the day, just enough to tell that Winter was but a step

behind; and yet there was in it also that elasticity and freshness that smack of the spring-time, and bring to every heart, even the saddest and most weary, some fleeting visions of joy and rest. The cattle were all slowly coming to the farmyard from the different out-stations, the horses weary from their hard work at the plough, and the placid cows weighted with the overflowing udders, that gave rich promise of milk and butter, both for the market and household use. A crowd of dogs ran about barking and yelling, and in their own demonstrative way giving a welcome to the patient, weary creatures that came trustingly home, as if conscious that rest and food awaited them there. The poultry that had all day roamed about at will, now also trooped homewards, and screamed, crowed, and cackled, as if determined that they too should not be forgotten in the distribution of the good things that were to come, and so adding their share to the general clamour. It was a pleasant, home-like scene, full of the old pastoral innocence and simplicity, and suggesting thoughts of rude plenty and hospitality, and of lives that were wearing away contentedly in the golden mean between poverty and riches.

Anyone who on that spring evening would cast a bird's-eye glance at the house and farm of Bawn-

more, would say that its owner was a well-to-do, comfortable man, and in that he would not be far wrong. But he would also see, on closer examination—if he were a competent judge of such things—a great deal that was not pleasant to look at. He would see that though the land was good, yet it was not made the most of, and that the system of farming practised on it, so far from being at “high pressure,” was, on the contrary, of that happy-go-lucky order that left a great deal to Providence and the weather, and regarded all improvements and new-fangled modes of culture with supreme contempt. In truth, the farm and house of Connor Burke would not have found much favour in the eyes of an English or Scotch agriculturist. They would both be disgusted by the absence of order and method in all directions, while the carelessness, waste, and dirt would have driven them half insane. The gates and the doors of the out-offices were all off the hinges, and as they were altogether, or very nearly, unacquainted with paint, were fast decaying from the combined action of time and weather. The fences all over the farm were so much neglected, that they were yawning with “gaps,” which said gaps were stopped up with furze bushes, pieces of old, useless timber, or any other thing that

might happen to be "convenient." The unpaved yard was ankle-deep in mud and loose litter of all sorts, the accumulation of all the dirt and rubbish of the past week, which had never been swept away to its proper place on the manure heap. Though there was a sty for the pigs, or what had at one time been intended for such, it was scarcely ever occupied except at night. Very far indeed from ornamental was the said sty, any more than it was useful, and defective in its internal accommodation, as well as unsightly in appearance. This opinion the pigs seemed to entertain as well as the beholders, for they always preferred any other place to that specially allotted for their own use. And when it was seen that the broad flag that had once formed the roof, had by some untoward accident been split in two, and had then fallen in, admitting the rain on one side, and that the door had been wrenched off its hinges, and was ever since lying up against the wall, so that the pigs could come and go at pleasure, it was not surprising that they took advantage of the liberty allowed them, and made their appearance in so many places that they seemed to be perfectly ubiquitous. The calves and fowls, allowed the same degree of freedom, elbowed the grunTERS stoutly, so that there were many tough battles fought in that

farmyard from morning until night. When the din of battle became too much, even for the seasoned ears of the inmates of the house, the dogs were called in to quell the riot, and disperse the combatants. The dogs, no way loth, charged vigorously into the very centre of the *mêlée*, and after a few moments of the most awful snarling, yelling, grunting, and cackling, the belligerents were fain to retire sullenly to their respective quarters, with torn wings, bleeding ears, and other dismal tokens of the fray.

About the house itself, and the offices attached to it, an appearance of plenty, and even wealth, contrasted forcibly with the total disregard of all order and neatness. Some of the offices were good, substantial stone buildings, like the dwelling-house, with good slated roofs, while others were only mud hovels, propped up at the four corners with heavy stones, and roofed with thatch more than half rotten from damp and neglect. The dwelling-house was indeed weatherproof, and tolerably comfortable and clean, but that is all that could be said in its praise, for in its construction beauty and symmetry had been altogether sacrificed for comfort and convenience. It was a long, low, rambling cottage of one storey, well thatched, and pierced here and there by

a few windows, which varied so much in size, and in the positions in which they were placed, as to set all the laws of architecture completely at defiance. The house had been lately whitewashed, and had behind it a clump of trees, which, though bare and leafless now in the early spring-time, yet must look pleasant when the foliage was full and green, which it would soon be when the year was a little older. There was a cabbage garden on one side, and a plot of early potatoes on the other, while in front was the farm-yard, where all the inhabitants of the farm, biped and quadruped, met as on common ground. The centre chimney gave out wreaths of blue smoke, as if proclaiming to all whom it might concern, that the evening meal was in course of preparation, and as if answering the call, the servants and farm-labourers came leisurely home, gossiping and chatting to each other as they went along. And despite the slovenly, careless look of everything, and the total want of all good management and good taste apparent everywhere, the farm and homestead of Bawnmore presented a pleasant picture to the weary traveller, as she approached it slowly on that chill spring evening.

If the outward appearance of the house gave promise of warmth and plenty, that promise was

amply fulfilled by the aspect of the interior. The large kitchen, which was the living-room of the family, was brilliant in the light of a huge fire of turf and bogwood, blazing and sparkling in a hearth so wide that it took up one side of the room altogether. The rafters overhead were black with age and smoke, and in all directions they were pierced with hooks from which depended a number of articles of the most miscellaneous description. Fitches and hams of bacon, hung side by side with the harness of the farmer's carts; hanks of thread and yarn just ready to be sent to the weaver, were mixed up with the long reins for the plough, and horse-collars, both new and in all stages of dilapidation; while long strings of golden-brown onions were hanging in neighbourly proximity with a saddle and bridle. Directly opposite to the fire, and occupying almost as much space, was the tall dresser, the special pride and glory of the *Vanithee*, or good woman of the house. Half this dresser consisted of shelves, the lower part of a press and two drawers. On the upper shelf were six plates and a dish of pewter, which were a part of Mrs. Burke's wedding portion, and consequently were held by her in peculiar respect and veneration. When common delf ware became cheap, those highly-prized articles were no longer used, but "wisely kept

for show," nor were they ever taken down from their elevated position on the dresser, except to undergo a weekly scouring, after which operation they were carefully replaced. To preserve those precious heir-looms from falling down, a rough fence of wire was nailed across the shelf on which they were placed in an upright position, so that their polish and brightness might dazzle the eyes of all the beholders thereof. The other shelves were stocked with plates, dishes, mugs, bowls, and other articles of coarse delf, all painted in the very gaudiest colours.

Such was the dresser, the glory of Bawnmore, and the envy of all the housewives in the district. The rest of the furniture was simple enough. A settle was at one side of the ample hearth, serving the double purpose of a seat by day, and at night when opened up, a comfortable bed, in which latter capacity it was used by the two serving-men who performed the greater part of the work on the farm. The tables were all of unpainted deal, the chairs ditto, but having the seats made not of timber, but of *sugawns*, or ropes made of twisted hay. At the extreme end of the kitchen was the "stellin," a bench of rough, unplanned wood, on which were ranged all the pots, pans, kettles, and other culinary utensils, belonging to the establishment.

Connor Burke, the master of this comfortable house, sat in a large, coarse arm-chair at one side of the chimney corner, smoking his pipe dreamily, as he watched the women of the household moving about, engaged in the performance of their evening duties. In age he was nearly the threescore and ten years allotted to man by the inspired writer, and he looked fully every year of his age. He was below the average height, thin and spare, but as wiry and hard as flint, and so healthy, that he used to say that he did not know what sickness was. His skin was yellow and wrinkled, and, as a match for that, he had a hooked nose, and lanthorn jaws that were sucked together at each side of a mouth from which all the teeth had long since taken their departure. Being perfectly bald, he wore an old brown wig, not unfrequently placed awry on his bare skull, and when this was the case, the effect produced by the wizened, hatchet face underneath, was certainly very comical, though it could hardly be called pleasing. His disposition was as disagreeable, as his appearance was unprepossessing. He had an immense fund of self-opinion, crass ignorance, and ill-temper stored up for occasional use, that would have sufficed for ten men instead of one. This crassitude was trying enough to those obliged to come in contact with

him when he was sober, but when he was drunk, it became intensified to such an outrageous degree, that he became altogether intolerable. It was not that he was at all a drunkard, in the common acceptation of the word, for he never took strong drink while he remained at home; but let him go to a fair, or a wedding, or a wake, or to any other place where whisky was going round, and he was sure to return home not only drunk, but with his temper so violent, and his tongue so abusive, that he was, for the time being, a terror to his unfortunate family. At no time very gentle or amiable, he became, when inflamed by drink, violent, disputatious, abusive, and as his much-enduring wife declared, "he'd neither lade nor dhrive." There was a legend current in the neighbourhood to the effect, that in the early years of their married life, he used to fling his wig into the fire whenever he wished to pick a quarrel with his wife, while in a state of intoxication. If she snatched the wig from off the fire, he thrashed her soundly for interfering; and if she let it burn, he thrashed her all the same, for being extravagant and careless. For this, and many similar exploits, he had obtained the contumelious nickname of *Croohooore Crussough*, or Cross Connor, a name that was considered by those

who knew him, to fit him exactly. At any rate, it stuck to him like a burr, and he was rarely called by any other name for the rest of his life.

But notwithstanding all his "crossness," he was not quite destitute of natural affection, but loved his three children as much as he was capable of loving anything outside himself. He loved the two younger passing well, but his eldest daughter, Biddy, or as he always called her in the pride of his heart, "Miss Biddy Burke," was as dear to him as the apple of his eye. She was his first-born child, and for years had been his only one; and for those years had been the sole recipient of any love that was in his nature to bestow. For her sake he toiled, and worked, and amassed money, to which he was careful to add something every year. After a few years his house was blessed by the addition of two more olive-branches, a son and another daughter; but Connor Burke remained faithful to his first favourite, and deemed it a point of honour that she should not be ousted from her position in the house, or her place in his affection, by the superior attractions of the new-comers. As time rolled on, he became more attached to Miss Biddy, if that could be possible. He declared that she resembled his own mother, after whom she was called, and constantly reminded him of her, while Tom and

Susie "took after their mother an' her people," which circumstance was by no means an advantage to them in his eyes. And certainly, if any idea of the defunct Mrs. Burke could be formed by the likeness her eldest granddaughter bore to her, it is to be feared that it would not by any means be an exalted one, for like Kattie Nale of lyric celebrity, Miss Biddy was "short and dark, like a cold winter's day." She was extremely plain, both in face and figure, and walked, if not with a decided lameness, yet with such a shambling, awkward gait, that she had all the appearance of being lame.

Tom and Susie were, as their father contemptuously expressed it, "the very moral ov the Carrols;" which opinion might well be taken in a very complimentary sense by the Carrol family, for both the young people were very fair types of rustic comeliness and manly strength. Tall, fair, and pleasant-looking, they were a marked contrast to their elder sister, especially Susie, who, like Molly Carew in the song above quoted, was "fresh and fair as the flowers in May." They were both great favourites with all their acquaintances and friends; but the more they were admired and loved, the more did the father's heart cling to his unattractive and neglected first-born. Often he declared, that if "Shusy was twice as purty

agin, she should never be married before Miss Biddy. No, in throth! There was no hurry at all about Shusy, not the laste taste in life ov a hurry. Let her take her time, an' wait for preferment until her turn came round, for she was nothing but a bit ov a slip. Miss Biddy Burke should never be obleeged to dance in her vamps for the likes ov *her*. My mind is made up on the matther, an' I wouldn't change it for nothing, nor for no wan. Whoever is the ould maid ov this family, it won't be Miss Biddy," and so on *ad infinitum*.

In consequence of this determination, from which neither expostulation nor entreaty had the power to make him swerve, he had refused in the most peremptory manner, several very eligible proposals for the hand of his youngest daughter. His wife and son had repeatedly reasoned with him on the want of prudence and common sense he displayed in this matter, as well as the great injustice he was doing Susie, who had never in any way offended or disobeyed him. But they might as well have reasoned with the wind for blowing round the house on a winter's day, as with Croohoore Crussough on this subject of the marriage of his daughters. On no point did he deserve his nickname more completely than on this.

As he sat by the fire smoking his pipe, his wife, a large, fair, placid-faced woman, went to and fro, directing the movements of her two daughters, who, assisted by a maidservant, were scalding milk-tubs, and doing other routine work for the dairy. When the milk had been poured into them, and the dairy shut up for the night, the family sat down to supper, which consisted of coarse brown bread and milk, with a pair of eggs for the old man. He was—for a wonder—in a more amiable mood this evening, than he had exhibited for a long time before, or at least a mood that might be called amiable for Croohoore Crussough.

CHAPTER V.

MATCHMAKING.

The father waketh for the daughter when no man knoweth,
and the care for her taketh away his sleep.

ECCLESIASTICUS.

CONNOR BURKE and his family had just sat down to supper, when the latch of the kitchen door was raised, and Oonagh, carrying her bundle in her hand, and followed by her dog, stood on the threshold with the usual kindly salutation of "God save all here!" In an instant Susie had sprung from her chair, and with a loud cry of joyful surprise, flung herself into the arms of her friend. She hugged her to her breast, she cried and laughed by turns, and in her rapture repeating over and over again, "Oonagh, Oonagh, '*a cushla geál*, you're as welcome as the flowers ov May!" The rest of the family also ad-

vanced to give their welcome to the new-comer as sincerely, though in a much less demonstrative fashion.

"*The vaha sin, avourneen, agus cead millia falthagh,*"* said Mrs. Burke, kissing the poor, weary girl affectionately. "Wisha, if this isn't the pleasant surprise you're givin' us."

"Welcome to Bawnmore, Oonagh," cried Connor Burke, shaking her hand with cordial heartiness, for she was *his own* relation, and besides, with all his faults, he was like all the Irish peasantry, extremely hospitable. "But lordsake, girl, your hand is as could as a stone, an' you look fairly bate up. Did you walk all the way from Ballycross to-day?"

"I did."

"Blood alive, Biddy! run out an' bring in another basket ov turf, an' a *smuthawn* ov bogdale to throw on the fire, an' Shusy, cut down some rashers off that flitch ov bacon over there, an' let me see them on the pan along wid a couple ov eggs, while a cat would be lickin' his 'air. Come, be alive, both ov ye; don't ye see that the poor girl is a'most kilt wid the could an' hunger?"

The two girls bustled about most willingly to

* *The vaha sin, avourneen, agus cead millia falthagh!*—Welcome, my darling, and a hundred thousand welcomes!

obey their father's commands, while their mother took off Oonagh's cloak, brought a chair for her to the fire, and by many other kind and motherly attentions, tried to make the weary girl know how welcome she was.

In a very short time, a smoking dish of rashers and eggs was laid on the table, and the family once more sat in, fully resolved to do ample justice to the unusual treat that the new-comer had been the means of affording them. Every one of those simple, good-natured people vied with each other as to which would show most kindness to the stranger, all the more welcome because she had come to them uninvited. When she had eaten her supper, Susie herself prepared a plentiful mess for Bran, declaring that no one else should feed him, as long as he and his mistress remained in Bawnmore.

"I hope, Oonagh, asthore, that you're come to stay wid us for a long dhrass," said Mrs. Burke, when they were all sitting round the fire after supper. "Sure it will be a rale thrate to the two girls 'to have you wid 'em."

"Why, then, 'a *vanithee*, it will be a greater thrate to myself, only that I don't like bein' troublesome."

"Oyeh, don't spake ov that at all. Sure you can

take the run ov the place wid the pair ov 'em, an' be a great help to 'em into the bargain. We have a lot ov new milch cows, an' betune the milkin' an' the young calves, they have enough to do, my hand to you."

"I thought that you always kept a regular dairy-maid for the spring an' summer months, one ov the County Limerick dairy-women?"

"Well, an' so we did; but the wan we had left us last week to go to America wid a brother ov hers."

"An' will you get another in her place?" asked Oonagh, who was not slow to see an opening for herself.

"Iss, if we can get her; but a good dairy-maid is not to be found undher every bush these times, an' I'd as lieve drag on as we are, than take up wid a bad wan."

"The neighbours at home in Castle Cloyne used to say that I was a good hand at dairy business," said Oonagh modestly; "anyhow, my butter always sold first quality. If you think, 'a *vanithee*, that I'd shuit the place, I'd be very glad to take it."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Burke, raising her hands and eyes in the greatest astonishment. "You, the child ov Martin MacDermott, to be a servant on any

wan's flure! Oh, blessed saints above, but this is quare news! I often hard ov the turns ov the world, but this is the greatest I ever hard ov."

"Everything my poor father had is gone, barrin' his honest name," replied Oonagh, with some pardonable pride. "'Tis a long story, an' a very sorrowful wan; but the ind of it is, that I must airn my bread the best way I can. Sure I'm not the first dacent father an' mother's child that had to do that same, an' I suppose I won't be the last. There's no disgrace in honest work. I'm strong an' healthy, an' you will see that I can get through your business as well as a stranger."

"What do you say, Connor?" said Mrs. Burke, turning to her lord and master. "I'm heart sorry she has to face the world, an' I never thought her dacent father's only child would come to such a pass. But sure as she's obleeged to airn her bread, 'tis better for her to begin wid frinds that know who an' what she is, an' will respect an' love her. I'd rather have her than a stranger, as she's willin' to come to tis, an' so I'm sure would the two girls. Oonagh won't be as lonesome wid us as wid strangers."

"Very well," he replied, "that's aisy settled. She's a good quite girl, an' come ov a very dacent stock. She's my own relation, too, for her grand-

mother, Sally Kelly, was married to *Thomaus Boccough*, my great-grandfather. He was lame, and you persave that's why they called him *Thomaus Boccough*, but sure that's neither here nor there. An' I'm sorry like yourself, that she's come down a little in the world, but as she'll be wid frinds, that won't make any differ."

So the matter was settled, much to the satisfaction of poor Oonagh, who felt that among those friendly, good-hearted people, she would have a peaceful, happy life. Already she experienced a feeling of rest and content to which she had long been a stranger; a feeling that she could lay down her head to sleep, and never trouble herself as to what might happen on the morrow.

When the two girls returned in from feeding the calves and pigs, their mother told them of the new arrangement by which Oonagh was to remain with them, not as a visitor, but as a member of the household, at which their delight was very great. Susie, as being her special friend, was enchanted, and kissed her over and over, until at last her father desired her to sit down, for that he was tired of her "lavoos."

"I wondher what's keepin' Tom so late?" he said after a short time. "'Tisn't often he stops out .

as late as what he is to-night, to tell the thruth ov the boy."

"Erra, how do you know who he met at the fair?" said his wife good-humouredly. "Sure 'tis the Shrove that's in it, an' boys an' girls will be always meetin' an' talkin' to wan another whenever, the Shrovetide comes round."

"What *ràmarsh* you're talkin', woman?" he cried in a surly tone. "Wisha, there's nothing in the whole world surprises me aiquil to the foolishness ov women. Conshumin' to me! but I think women has no idaya ov anything whatsomer but Shrovetide, an' matchmakin'. The divel another thing throubles 'em, from wan year's ind to the other. Soon enough youngstheres get quare notions into their heads, without an ould fool like you, that ought to be makin' your sowl, puttin' 'em up to it. If you only minded your bisness as well as you mind the Shrove, what rich people we'd all be at the ind ov the year!"

"Oh, then I am a foolish old woman, sure enough," she replied calmly, though a hot flush mounted to her face. "An' to be jokin' wid a man that can't indherstand a joke at all. If I had the lastè gump-tion in life, I'd keep my jokes for them that would know how to take 'em, an' then you'd have no call to be snappin' at me, every time I open my mouth."

To this Croohoore Crussough only replied by a surly grunt, while the rest of the company kept a discreet silence. At last one of the girls cried out, "Oh, here is Tom!" and immediately after the young man came into the kitchen.

"Oh, Tom! here's Oonagh MacDermott," cried Susie, with a glad smile on her pretty face, "an' she's come to stop wid us for good an' all. I'll go bail you didn't hear any news at the fair half so good as that."

"Fake an' sure I didn't, and that's the thruth, the same as if the Brevary was in my hand," said Tom, shaking Oonagh's hand not once, but many times. "I didn't bring home any news as good as what I found before me, sure enough."

"Come over here, an' sit down alongside me, an' tell me all about the fair, '*a vouhaleen bawn*,'"* said the old man, who, notwithstanding his great love for "Miss Biddy," was both fond and proud of his only son.

"Oh, 'tis too long to tell all in a minnit; I must get time to rest myself, an' think ov it all."

"But tell us, man, how prices went at the fair," cried the old man impatiently, when Tom, having taken off his outer coat, sat down before the fire.

* '*A vouhaleen bawn*—My fair little boy.

"Well, the fair was a great fair intirely for good milch cows an' bonnives, but as for dhry cows an' store pigs, them that had 'em warn't axed what brought 'em there."

"Blood an' 'oun's, man! Is it the thruth you're tellin' us? Faix, we wor very lucky to keep our bonnives at home for the present. As the pratees isn't very good wid us this year, we may as well give 'em to the bonnives, as let 'em go for a song. We'll get a rattlin' price for them next Michaelmas."

"You may be right there, father. Any way, we can't help it. The same bonnives will be good fat pigs when they have the last ov the small pratees ate."

While the father and son were discussing their business affairs in this way, the two girls had brought Oonagh into the little room where they were to sleep, and Mrs. Burke had gone to her own, where she employed herself every night for an hour before she went to bed, in saying her prayers and reciting the rosary. The two men remained for some time longer at the kitchen fire, to smoke a last pipe, and talk over the news of the fair.

"Tom, you never would guess who spint a piece ov the day wid myself," said the old man when the women were all gone. "Come, now; I'll give you three guesses."

"I'm no good at guessin', so you may as well tell it out at wanst," answered artful Tom, who had his own shrewd suspicions respecting the visitor.

"Why, thin, it was ould Bryan Cahill, an' his son Bryan Oge.* An' how that you know who they wor, you must guess what brought 'em."

"Oh, that's aisy done. Ov coorse they came matchmakin'," said Tom, laughing. "What else would bring 'em both here at Shrovetide, but to look for a wife an' a fortune? An' which ov the girls is that play-boy Bryan Oge in consate wid?"

Before answering this question old Connor looked round very cautiously, to ascertain that there were no listeners to the conversation. When he made sure that they were quite alone, he drew his chair nearer to that of his son, and looking him full in the face, said, in a tone of the utmost vexation, "For which ov the colleens did they come matchmakin', is it? Why, then, for the wan they won't get, an' that's Shusy."

"Won't get!" repeated the son in great surprise. "Father, what do you mane? Do you want to persuade me that you refused such a match for your daughter, as Bryan Cahill? Why, he'd get his choice wife among all the girls in the whole country; an'

* Oge—Young.

the very best ov 'em would jump at him, if he'd only say the word to her."

"All the same, he won't get his choice ov my little girls. I tould him so, an' I tell it now to you."

"But what answer did you give the dacent people, might I ax?"

"Well, I tould 'em that they could have Miss Biddy, for as she's the eldher, she's first for preferment. Moreover, I said that I paid 'em a great compliment intirely in offerin' her to 'em, an' that I had it always settled in my own mind to give more to her than to Shusy. But Bryan Oge started up before his father could say a word, an' said it was Shusy that he wanted, an' not her sisther. So I up an' tould the pair ov 'em, that I wouldn't let any man that ever stud in shoe-leather run through my little girls, an' take his pick an' choice ov 'em. They must be married in their turn, or never at all."

"An' you refused Bryan Oge Cahill, the best match, as well as the handsomest boy in the three baronies!" exclaimed Tom Burke in the greatest dismay. "Begor, you threwn the girl's luck over your shoulder, an' mark my words, you'll live to be heart sorry for it. Oh, father! how could you thrate poor Shusy that a way?—how was she ever a deserver ov it? She was a good girl, ever

an' always, an' never wanst turned round on the flure to displace either you or her mother since the day she was born."

"I'm not faultin' Shusy, Tom, at all, an' what's more, I wouldn't listen to any wan else doin' it; so take care, my fine fella, what you say ov her in my hearin'. She's a good girl, an' a purty girl, I'm not denyin' it, be no manner ov manes; but if she was twice as good, an' as purty agin, I won't let her eldher sisther be past over or disrespected to plase her. I tell you, Tom, I won't have it. Shusy is a dale younger, an' has more time to wait for her luck, an' she must be satisfied to take her turn, or I'll know the rason why."

"An' do you think Bryan Oge will wait? See if he does! There isn't a man in the world, barrin' yourself, would think or expect such a foolish thing. An' why would he wait, I'd like to know? When you see him married wan ov these fine days to another man's daughter, 'tis yourself that'll be ready to cut your throat wid rale spite an' vexation. Sure 'tis the thruth I'm tellin' you."

"Oh yarra, do you hear this?" cried the old man apologetically. "'Tis well, Tom Burke, you know that I wouldn't let him go, if I could help it. I offered him Miss Biddy, over an' over agin, wid more

money than I'd give any other man—three hundred pound in hand, an' another hundred next Lady Day. An' now wasn't that a handsome offer, I ax yourself? You'll hardly b'lieve me when I say that the mane nager refused it, ov coorse houldin' out for more. In the ind, sooner than let him go, an' lose such a match for my little girl, I offered to throw in the bay mare, an' her foal, along wid the *arrighed chese*.* What more than that could I do? It would be a great match for Miss Biddy, I own, for he is very rich, an' a good, clever boy into the bargain, but if he was twiced as good an' clever, I couldn't go farther, nor make him a fairer offer. No, in throth."

"You could, father. You could have given him the wife he came for, an' he'd take her for just half ov what you are satisfied to give Biddy. If a man fancies wan girl, that's no rason he's to be forced to marry another that he don't fancy at all, an' you have no right to throw away Shusy's luck, for the sake ov Biddy. 'Tisn't fair. Oh father! only say the word, an' tired as I am, I'll start off this minnit for ould Cahill's, an' my hand to you, everything will be settled intirely to your satisfaction."

"Oh wisha! wisha! did any poor Christhen ever

* *Arrighed chese*—Ready money, or money paid down.

hear the like? Oh, lay me alone, you foolish boy! Don't you know that I'm book sworn on it? Don't you remimber wan time that yourself an' your mother was givin' me no pace about another match, that I wint an' took the Brevary that I'd never let Miss Biddy be so far disrespected as to have her younger sisther preferred before her. Miss Biddy is first for preferment, an' Shusy must wait for her turn. I tould you that often."

"Well, all I can say," said Tom, much provoked, "is that you wor a great fool to take such an oath, an' greater agin to stick to it. Sure all the clergy in the diocese will tell you that. If you're advised by me, you'll break through that wicked oath, that you took when you wor a thrifle hearty. It is a shame, a burnin' shame, that a nice, purty girl like Shusy is to lose the best match ov the Shrovetide, becace you can't get any wan to take that ugly little *gránioge* off your hands."

As Tom concluded, the face of Croohoore Crus-sough became almost purple with suppressed rage. This disrespectful epithet applied to his favourite child by anyone but his only son, would have sufficed to lash him into madness. Even as it was, he was very angry indeed.

"Folly on, young man, folly on, an' see how it'll

thrive wid you. I must own that Miss Shusy an' her bachelor have a great back intirely in you; a grate faction all ov ye, in lague together agin a little crayther ov a girl, an' a poor ould man. But if ye wor as intricate agin, I'm able for ye, an' for all ye're skamin'. My money is my own, an' I won't give it but to them I like. *Dhieul a laffina!* An' I don't care that for the whole box an' dice ov ye!" and he snapped] his fingers viciously in his son's face.

"But, father, won't you hear to rason?" remonstrated Tom in a milder tone, conscious that in his last speech he had gone a little too far.

"Rason or no rason, I'll never give my consint to it, an' I wondher greatly that you have the impidence to ax me, an' you knowin' that I kissed the holy Brevary on it. May the divel saize it for a story! It will put me undher the sod, so it will."

Any other than Tom Burke would now have given up the cause in despair, but he knew his father well, and like a skilful general, would not retire from the field until he had brought up the force prudently kept in reserve for the final *coup*. Assuming an air of great indifference, he said quietly:

"Very well, have it all as you like yourself. They

are your daughters, an' not mine, an' your money, too, is your own, to give it or keep it. So please yourself. But don't think that becace Bryan Cahill didn't get a wife from you, that he won't get wan from some other man. Faix, he will so, an' a fortune too, I'll go bail. An' why wouldn't he? wid his noble, fine farm, an' slated house, an' a *bawn* full ov milch cows! He has nothing to do but go across to Matt Hassett, at the other side ov the road, an' get his choice wife among four good girls, an' a dale more money than what you could give him. Sure 'tis no new story to you, what an inthricate ould fella Matt Hassett is, an' how far he would go to circumvent you. He took a farm over your head; he made you pay twice over what you owed him, becace you lighted your pipe in a mistake wid his resate, an' now the best bachelor in the three baronies he'll snap up before your face, just to spite you. 'Tis Matt himself that'll be proud to get the whip-hand ov you, an' no wan will have the laste pity for you that hears the story. And why? Becace when you had the five, knave, an' ace ov hearts in your hand together, your play was so bad, that you let him have the game. That's why!"

An expression of the greatest dismay came over the old man's shrunken, hatchet face. He shifted

his position uneasily, and taking an old blue cotton handkerchief out of the crown of his hat, he began wiping away the moisture that broke out over his forehead in large beads.

"Oh, Tom, *avick machree!* I never thought ov that," he gasped out with dry, parched lips. "Oh, wirra sthrew! what a misfortunate poor ould man I am this blessed night. Before I'd consint that that rogue, Matt Hassett, would have such a crow over me as to hook Bryan Oge for wan ov his long yalla galliganties, I'd go an' clift myself. Oh, then, Tom 'achree, advise me what I'm to do, for I'm intirely dependin' on you for advice an' consolation. Oh, vo! vo! see yourself what a hobble I'm in."

"I have no advice to give now, but what I gave before. Step out like a man, an' be beforehand wid Matt. Sind for Byran Oge, an' give him the wife he axed for, an' as much money as you can afford. Don't be frettin' about Biddy for the present; there's no fear ov her husband, when you intind to give her such a good fortune. Many a wan will be glad to get her, an' though she isn't as handsome as her sisther, she's a good, industrious girl, an' that's well known ov her far an' near. But we'll give up arguin' about it for the present, for I'm dead bate afther the day, an' longin' to go to bed."

So leaving his father to crack the nut he gave him so artfully, Tom yawned, rose up, and went off to his bed at the other end of the house, and the old man, after a few muttered curses on the devoted head of his enemy, Matt Hassett, soon followed his example.

CHAPTER VI.

A PROPOSAL FOR MISS BIDDY.

And then outspak the bride's sister,
As she came in frae the byre :
" Oh ! gin that I were but married,
'Tis a' that I would desire."

OLD SCOTCH SONG.

THE cold, gray dawn of an early spring morning was slowly creeping in through the solitary pane of glass that did duty for a window in Tom's little bedroom, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder, and starting up from a sound sleep, found his father standing beside his bed. The old man's face was pale and haggard, and he looked as if he had spent a very wakeful and anxious night.

" You needn't be in any dhread, Tom," he said in a very low voice, as if fearful of being overheard, " there's nothing in life wrong wid me, barrin' that I couldn't get a wink ov sleep all night, in regard

ov what you said to me about that blasted robber, Matt Hassett. Now, listen hether to me, Tom *avick*, for you're the only frind an' adviser I have in the whole world. I tell you, Tom, that if Matt Hassett takes Bryan Oge from my little girl, blast me! but I'll set fire to the house over his head. I will, an' be satisfied to swing for it afftherwards. That ruffin outbid me wid my landlord, he perjured himself in open coort, to make me pay him money twice over, an' now if wan ov his yalla mullots takes this good match from me, I'll make him sup sorra."

"Well, father, 'tis all in your own hands. You can settle it all fair an' aisy, if you only do what's right," replied Tom, very coolly. "Go off at wanst, as soon as you ate your breakfast, to the Cahills; or, if you like it betther, I'll go, an' say you're satisfied to give 'em Shusy, an' what they axed wid her on yestherday. There's nothing in life aisier than that, or surer. You'll secure the best an' the richest match in the parish for your daughter, an' Matt Hassett won't have any satisfaction over you. As you axed my advice, there it is for you."

"But Bryan wouldn't have Biddy at all," cried old Connor in a doleful voice. "I tell you agin, that 'tis Shusy he wants, an' not Biddy."

"An' I tell you agin to give him the girl he

wants. If Shusy was twice as purty, an' had twice as much money, Bryan Cahill is husband good enough for her any day in the year; an' you know that yourself, as well as me."

"I know it, Tom," cried the old man, grasping his son's hands, and looking at him with the harassed expression of some hunted animal brought to bay. "I know that well, '*achree sullae*.* But my oath, Tom, I can't break through that, you persave, whatever happens. Oh, yarra! what's the use ov all this *shanahus*, when you know well that I wint an' kissed the Brevary on the head ov it? I never can hear to a match for Shusy, till her eldher sisther is first married."

"Well, that puts an end to the whole box an' dice ov it," said Tom, settling himself back in bed again. "The only differ it makes now is, that you have two girls on your hands, when you might provide well for wan ov 'em without much trouble. That's all about it. An' in the name ov God let Bryan Oge go off wid himself to the Hassetts, an' let us not be botherin' ourselves any more about him."

The father and son gazed at each other fixedly

* '*Achree sullae*!—My heart's calf!

for some time in silence; the farmer in great tribulation and perplexity, and the latter affecting an indifference that he did not feel.

"I have it, be cripes!" exclaimed the old man in a tone of joyful triumph. "I have it all now, glory be to God that put it into my poor ould head! I'll give Miss Biddy to her ould bachelor, *Michaul Foddha*,* an' then Bryan Oge can have Shusy an' my blessin'."

"But you refused Biddy to Michaul, every wan ov the last three Shroves! Don't you remimber this time twelve months, when himself an' his uncle follyed us into Doyle's public-house, an' you'd have nothing to do wid 'em, though I was arguin' wid you till I was hoarse. They wor so much offinded, that they never came near us any more, match-makin'."

"But Michaul is to the good yet, an' in regard ov his bein' offinded, you'll see how cleverly I'll come round him, an' how finely I'll sluther him. Never fear. An' I'll give him fifty pound on the nail, more than he was wantin' this time twelvemonth. That's a power ov money, Tom!"

"So it is; but isn't it for the girls you have it?"

* *Michaul Foddha*—Long or tall Michael.

You have enough for yourself an' my mother while ye live, an' that ye may live long to enjoy it! The farm will be my share when you're gone, an' enough too, so I don't begridge the poor girls what will provide for 'em."

"You're a good boy, Tom, as good as any father ever rared; I'll say that ov you, if it was to be my last word in this world. An' you think my plan a good wan?"

"I do. I think it is a good way for us to get ourselves out ov this cursed boghole, without lettin' Matt Hassett be crowin' over us," replied cunning Tom. "Stick to that, an' I'll go bail, it will take the consate out ov the whole ov 'em."

"*Thurrum a llauve 'a vick machree!*"* exclaimed the old man, in the exuberance of his delight at having found a way by which he thought he could get out of his great dilemma. "Faix, you wor a bright boy, ever an' always, an' I'm proud ov you, so I am. Turn out ov bed now at wanst, an' skelp off to the Cahills, an' tell 'em at the peril ov their lives to hould on, an' have no call at all to them Hassetts. As soon as I get my bruckwist, I'll go off to *Michaul Foddha's*, an' you'll see that I'll manage

* *Thurrum a llauve 'a vick machree!*—Give me your hand, son of my heart!

him cleverly. 'Tis myself that will soap him well, till I can twist him round my finger like a wand ov sally. Now what have you to say?"

After breakfast, the father and son left the house on their different errands. The artful Tom was very proud of the success of his diplomacy. Neither Metternich nor Talleyrand ever felt more self-satisfied after having effected a successful negotiation, than did this honest fellow, when he found that his own little stroke of policy had been attended with such a happy result.

In the meantime, Oonagh was getting on in her new *rôle* in the most satisfactory manner. The kind-hearted Mrs. Burke made no difference between her and her own girls, while *they* looked on her as on a beloved sister, who had come home after a long absence. All three occupied the same bed-room, shared in the same labours, and ate at the same table. If ever she felt that she was a servant, it was with a feeling of intense thankfulness, remembering that she was not eating the bread of dependence, and that though her wages were not very large, they were growing day by day, and would be at all times sufficient for her own simple wants. This feeling of independence was the first ray of comfort that shone on her since her father's death, for nothing

sweetens life more than the consciousness of independence, no matter how humble and lowly it may be. It lightens the hardest labour, and gives a sweet savour to the coarsest food. The unbearable load of debt that had so long weighed her down had been removed, and she could walk erect in the face of day, without shrinking from observation, for like Longfellow's blacksmith, she "owed not any man." A sense of rest and peace came gradually to her mind, and her spirits regained something of their old equable and cheerful state.

But perfect happiness is a plant that can find no root in the hard, cold soil of this world. The remembrance of her faithless lover, and of the unworthy way in which he had treated her, was for ever rankling in her heart. And it was no small aggravation of the girl's sorrow, to feel that though she heartily despised this man, as a true and noble nature must ever despise one that is mean and base, she still loved him, or rather, she could not effectually trample out the ashes of the old love that once lived in her heart. They still smouldered, and she hated herself for being so weak as to care still for so very unworthy a thing as he had shown himself to be. But there was an excuse for her weakness. Her love had not been the growth of a day, [and it was

not in a day that she could succeed in rooting it out.

On returning home about three o'clock, Tom Burke found that his father had not yet made his appearance. When he gave his mother an account of the state of affairs—one word of which her lord and master had not deigned to tell her—he went out again, and on to the public road, for the purpose of meeting the old man, and hearing what he had to say, before they would enter the house. When he had gone about a mile, he saw his father coming towards him, and saw also that he was very drunk. It was quite apparent that the negotiation between him and Long Michael, had not been carried on without that invariable accompaniment to country match-making, plenty of whisky. Croohooore's hat was tilted off to the back of his head, while the wig had been pushed on one side, leaving the other completely, bald as it was, exposed to the keen wind of a March evening. His "loody," or frieze great-coat, was hanging merely on one shoulder, the empty sleeves dangling down, and the long skirts trailing in the mud behind him. His progress was very slow, for he staggered from one side of the road to the other, quite as often as he went forward in the straight line towards home. He was very drunk, of that

there could be no earthly doubt, but as, whenever he left home even for a day, he always returned in this condition, it caused no surprise in Tom's mind that matters had gone on in the old well-worn groove.

When the old man saw his son, he threw his hat into the air with a wild "hurroo" of triumph, while he shook him by the hand over and over again.

"Everything is all settled now, 'avick, an' your poor ould father is the proud an' the happy man this day; glory be on high for ever, amin! Miss Biddy will be marrid a Sunday night to her lovier Michaul, an' no thanks to the robber Matt Hassett for that same. But listen hether to me, Tom. Faix, I was obleeged to give him the odd fifty pound, over an' above what he was satisfied wid last Shrove, an' the black heifer to the back ov it. But so itself; what hurt?"

"Well, if you did itself, what great differ does it make?" answered Tom, taking his arm, and leading him along. "Sure it is your own child that you're givin' it to. An' if he never said a word about the heifer, it was only right that Biddy should get it, lavin' your house for good. She rared that heifer herself, an' med a great pet ov it, an' that's the laste present you could make her."

"You're right there, Tom. She must get it, by

St. Bridget her namesake, an' she's a deserver ov it, if it was twice as good. Don't think that I begridge it to her. Be this crass," and he crossed his fore-fingers one over another, "I'd give it to her if it was med ov gold. An' if he's a good husband an' fond ov her, that I may never die in sin, if I don't give 'em wan ov the little Kerries; see if I don't! Afther a little while," he added reflectively, "for I'll wait till I see how he thrates her. I'll look before me an' considher, before I give any more than what I promised to-day. I won't be so great a fool as not to keep something for the *vanithee* an' myself, agin our old age. I won't make a beggar ov myself, to plase anywan. I'm poor enough, dear knows, as it is. Oh, Tom dear, your ould father is very poor, very poor intirely, an' if things goes on this a way, I'll soon not have the price ov a bit ov tobaccy to put in my pipe. You don't b'lieve me, I persave."

"I do b'lieve you, father; ov coorse I do. But let us get home as fast as we can, for you're very tired," replied Tom, trying to soothe him, and bring him home quickly.

"The divel another word, crooked or sthrait, I'll tell you, for 'tis aisy seen you're not mindin' what I'm sayin' to you. My son Tom, my own son, don't b'lieve what his poor ould father is tellin' him! Oh,

wirra! wirra! Isn't this a poor case, I ax ye all?" addressing an imaginary audience.

By this time, Crochoore Crussough's mood had completely changed from what it was when he had met his son, and he had now entered into that stage of intoxication known as the maudlin. All the wild exultation he had shown at first, had given way to the deepest despondency. He bitterly bewailed his hard fate, in being cursed with a son so undutiful as Tom, so unfeeling and hard-hearted, and, sitting down in the mud by the roadside, he wrung his hands passionately, and shed abundance of tears.

"I'm ruined intirely, broke horse an' fut; an' when I pay the fartunes ov these two colleens, the rest ov us, my son Tom, an' myself, an' the ould woman, must turn out to beg wid the bag on our back, or else walk sthraight into the poor-house. The divel blast the other thing is before us this day, as I'm a sinner! Oh, vo! vo! Amn't I the misfortunate poor ould crayther, to have such bad luck follyin' me everywhere, night an' day? Wouldn't it be the aise to my poor heart, if I was dead, an' berrid beyant in Kilcarrol churchyard, along wid all my people? Ochone! ochone!" and he wept copiously once more.

"You must rouse yourself, father," said Tom, assuming a voice and manner of authority. "There

are people comin' on, an' they'll both see an' hear what a show you're makin' ov yourself. If Matt Hassett, or any ov his family, wor to see you now, keening that a way by the side ov the road, what would they think, but that you an' all ov us wor in some great cleft stick, an' you know yourself what cakes an' ale that would be to them. Rise up out ov the mud, an' come home wid me, I bid you."

"Sure enough, Tom, 'tis cakes an' ale any throuble ov mine would be to that infernal villian, an' his mane crew, an' I'm only a common *omadhawn* to be sittin' here cryin' an' keening for no rason in life; for nothing at all, be japers!" said the old man, whose variable temper had now entered into another phase. "I'll let that common ruffin see that I'm as good as himself, an' a dale betther, if the thruth was known. An' listen hether to me, Tom: won't I have a fine crow over him when one ov my little girls is married to Michael Daly, an' the other to Bryan Cahill! Faix, 'tis a fit of the yalla jandice he'll get on the head ov it. I promised the Daly's that I'd pay the money *arrighed chese*, an' what Hassett that you ever hard ov, could do that?"

After some time, and a great deal of trouble, Tom contrived to bring his father home. In the excess of his drunken triumph he informed all the women,

the moment he entered the house, that Miss Biddy was to be married on the following Sunday. He was most particular in his directions to his wife about the wedding-feast, charging her to spare no expense, but to have everything that was fit and proper to make such a great event go off well and respectably. Everything was to be of the best, and his friends and neighbours should all see how dearly he loved his "little Bridge," and respected the young man who was to be her husband. At last, after having given vent to more than the usual rant and folly which inseparably accompanied his drunken bouts, his wife and son got him to bed, although not without much persuasion and trouble.

The three girls then gathered round the kitchen fire to have a good chat over the great news, for who is the woman, either old or young, that is not pleased and interested by the prospect of a wedding, either proximate or remote? The bride-elect, particularly, was in the seventh heaven of delight. She had had so few lovers, and had been so often disappointed in her matrimonial expectations, that she had begun to despair of ever being married at all. Now that all things had at last been finally arranged, and that in a few days she was really and truly to become a bride, and saved from the great disgrace of "dancing

in her vamps" at the wedding of her younger sister, she could hardly conceal her joy. She knew that she was no longer young, and had not, even in her youth, been good-looking, and that her chances of being married were becoming less and less as time rolled on.

Poor "Miss Biddy!" she was unaffectedly rejoiced at her approaching "preferment," as her father expressed it, and artless and simple enough not to make any secret of her satisfaction. The two other girls, with all their hearts, sympathised with her in her happiness, and it was only when the first note of the "cock's shrill clarion" told them that morning was near at hand, that they went to bed, a very contented and happy trio.

With the following morning began the preparations for the eventful day, not "big with the fate of Cato and of Rome," but with that of Miss Biddy and her constant swain, Michael Daly. Armed with the sinews of war in the shape of some well-worn bank-notes, fished up by old Connor from the deepest recess of the old chest that was at the foot of his bed, Tom and his two sisters, as soon as they had eaten their breakfast, set off in high spirits for the nearest town. The business of the girls was to purchase such few additions to their simple stock of clothes, as would suffice for the bride and her

attendant hand-maiden on the wedding-day. Tom's business was to bring home "the little groceries" necessary for the wedding-feast, consisting of a large supply of tea and sugar, lemons for punch, and though last, not the least item of the catalogue, whiskey *galore*. To these were added pipes and tobacco, an unlimited supply of bread, and a coarse kind of confectionery known as crackers and toasting-cakes. Mrs. Burke and Oonagh remained at home; and their time was fully occupied in making butter, killing fowl, and other necessary employments, which were considered by the former as suitable for the proper celebration of her daughter's wedding-day.

The old man, now once more sober, also remained at home. Sometimes he strolled out to the garden near the house, where his men were planting potatoes, and sometimes he sat in his usual seat in the chimney corner, and while he smoked his pipe, watched with complacent earnestness the proceedings of his wife and Oonagh as they went in and out about their work. For once in his life he was quiet, and satisfied both with himself and the world, and neither snapped viciously, nor found fault with anything that was done. His darling, Miss Biddy, would not be "an old maid left on the shelf," and Susie, his *colleen dhas*, would very soon be married to the handsomest young man, as well as the

richest farmer in the district. And—best and sweetest thought of all !—Matt Hassett would be circumvented ! He and his four “long galliganties” would be eaten up with envy, as well as put completely in the shade, by the wonderful uprise and prosperity of the Burke family. The thought was glorious, and almost enough to repay him for the farm that had been “taken over his head,” and the money that he had been made to pay twice over.

CHAPTER VII.

AN IRISH COUNTRY WEDDING.

You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting,
With most admired disorder.

SHAKESPEARE.

As time never stands still, Sunday at last arrived, and all things were ready for the wedding in Bawnmore. All the simple skill of Mrs. Burke and her handmaids was exerted to the utmost, in the effort to make all things as they should be, in honour of the great event that was to be celebrated on that day. Many hands make light work, and as the entire family worked with a will, all the preparations were completed before the arrival of the guests.

Two rows of long, narrow tables, that were borrowed for the occasion from Mrs. Doyle, at whose public-house the match had been made, extended from side to side of the kitchen, leaving an open

space in the middle. These tables were covered with large joints of meat, cooked in the most primitive manner; bacon, pork, and corned beef, intermixed with geese and turkeys. If *quality* had not been much considered in the bill of fare, that omission was amply compensated for by its great *quantity*. It must be admitted that the fowls were very much out of season—what else could be expected in the month of March?—and required an immensity of boiling to make them eatable. *Mais n’importe*, the guests had brought to the dinner the appetite of famished wolves, and consequently were not inclined to be fastidious as to what was before them. Loaves of bread were scattered at intervals between the dishes; but lest there should be any scarcity of so necessary a part of the dinner, an additional supply was carried round the tables in two large wicker baskets, such as are generally used for turf! There was no end of green cabbage—it was too early in the year for the white—placed under the meat, and of course plenty of potatoes, both boiled, and roasted in the ashes. It would have made a London Alderman pine with envy, to see the way those hardy, robust, country people—with most of whom a meat dinner was a luxury of very rare occurrence—set to work to make the most of the good cheer that had been so plentifully provided for

their entertainment. The rusty bacon, and greasy pork, with the usual accompaniment of cabbage, the tough old fowls, the piles of bread, and smoking hot potatoes, all disappeared as if by magic. Connor Burke sat at the head of one table, and Michael Daly, the bridegroom, did duty as host at the head of the other. They were not, indeed, very expert carvers, either of them; indeed, the less that is said about their performance in this respect, the better. But the guests found no fault with the sawing, and tearing, that were intended for carving, and as long as their plates were heaped up, they did not care whether the meat was neatly jointed or not. In fact, the carving was a decided success.

The bride sat beside her father, dressed out in all the colours of the rainbow, and looking as pleased and happy as a bride should look. Mrs. Burke, her second daughter, and Oonagh, did not sit down at all, but, accompanied by Tom, who acted as waiter, kept moving up and down by the tables, attending to the guests, and supplying their wants, so that no one should have reason to think himself neglected. One person required a knife, another a fork, a third a plate, and so on; but under the hospitable superintendence of the "*Vanithee*," and her willing aids, all were made as comfortable as possible. It was only

when the dinner was over—for even with the keenest appetites in the world, people cannot go on eating for ever—that they retired to a little back room to get some dinner for themselves, and some rest after all the fatigue of the day.

The marriage ceremony was not to be performed until a late hour in the evening, for the parish priest was absent at a conference of the clergy of the Diaconate, and could not reach Bawnmore in time for dinner. He had offered to send his coadjutor, but to this old Connor decidedly objected. No *curate* should marry his little girl, and as the parish priest could not come to dinner, they would wait until it was his convenience to come later on. His place at the head of the principal table was filled by the bridegroom, who but for the priest's absence would have gone about with Tom Burke, attending to the wants of the company. Everything went on well and smoothly, however, notwithstanding the absence of the chief guest; and the wedding of Miss Biddy Burke promised to be a decided and brilliant success.

When the last fragments of the dinner had been cleared away, and distributed among a crowd of beggars who were squatted on the grass outside the door, waiting for their share of the feast, the tables were moved as near to the wall on both sides of the kitchen

as possible. This was done to make room for the junior members of the company to enjoy their favourite amusement of dancing. The old people retired into the background behind the tables, and smoked their pipes, while they discussed among themselves such important questions as the price of butter, the spring tillage, or the prospects of "Repale." A fiddler and piper were stationed in the chimney corners, one at each side, so that they could relieve each other, for when the dancing began, it was, to quote the newspapers, "kept up with spirit." The ball was opened by the young man of the house, who led out a very pretty, bashful-looking girl, and they danced the first jig to the entire approbation of the company, and they were pronounced by everyone to be "a very nate couple intirely." It was generally said, that when both his sisters were married, Tom Burke would not long remain a bachelor. The next jig was danced by Susie and her lover, Bryan Oge, and they went far to bear away the laurels that had been acquired by the previous couple. Reels succeeded jigs, or rather they were danced alternately, according to the music asked for by the different sets of dancers. Some of them liked that lively jig known as "the Foxhunter," while others preferred a *moneen*, or a *slip jig*. Some liked a reel danced by two persons only, to the inspiring

strains of "Lady Mary Ramsay," or "Haste to the Wedding," and others liked better a reel danced by four, and known as "the figure of eight." And certainly, to see the zest and energy with which those young people went at it, was really amazing! It was very pleasant too, and so contagious, that few could resist the inclination to jump up and join in the fun. Talk of dancing! There may be fashion and elegance in quadrilles, and what are called round dances, but for thorough enjoyment, and unaffected grace, show me before all else an Irish country girl dancing away, with her easy carriage, sparkling eyes, and a heart as light as her heels.

While the young people were amusing themselves by "takin' the flure," the seniors looked on approvingly, and related stories of their own youthful days, and of the wonderful adventures that had befallen them. However, as the whisky went round, it seemed very probable that when the priest arrived to perform the marriage ceremony, he would find the greater part of the company more or less "hearty." First they began to sing altogether, each man perfectly irrespective of his neighbour, and from singing, they proceeded to speech-making, some in the vernacular, and others in English. One gentleman was so anxious that he should be fully heard, and of

course appreciated, that fearing he could not make himself sufficiently audible where he sat, he mounted up on his chair, and began ventilating his views with all the strength of his lungs. Almost immediately near this performer, was another, who was favouring the company in a very cracked, hoarse voice, with his own words to the air of "That's the time o' day, my boys." On the opposite side was another disciple of Apollo, sitting on an empty butter-cask turned upside down, steadying himself by keeping his back firmly against the wall, while his battered old hat was pressed down tightly over his nose. He was chanting in a voice frightfully out of tune, a lugubrious ditty in Irish, which no one who heard it could understand, but which he himself fully believed to be "*Colleen dhas cruthen na moe.*"*

At a small table that was drawn a little to one side, sat Connor Burke and his son-in-law elect; and it was quite apparent that the old man had taken more whiskey than was good for him. He had been drinking it in small quantities all the evening, and as the fumes of the spirit mounted to his brain, his habitual crassitude and bad temper mounted

* *Colleen dhas cruthen na moe*—The pretty girl milking her cow.

with it. And as the truth must be told, his new ally, Michael Daly, had not been slow in following his example. He was a very tall young man, which had got him the nickname of "foddha" or long, had fiery red hair, and the kind of complexion that is known as sandy. He had been courting Miss Biddy for a long time, or rather he coveted the good fortune which it was well known that plain-looking damsel would bring to her husband. The old man had always had his own shrewd suspicions as to the disinterestedness of Michael's attentions, and it was solely owing to the singular dilemma in which he found himself placed, combined with the persuasions of his son, that he at all consented to receive so sordid a wooer for his favourite daughter.

"Why, thin, Michaul Daly," said Connor, whose brain was getting more and more confused with every glass of punch that he drank, "gi' me your hand, for 'tis myself that's proud an' glad to see you sittin' there out fornent me. An' I'll say it out, before all the dacent people that's in it, that I'm rale proud to be joined to you, an' to all ov the good ould stock you kem from. Look here now, Michaul 'a vick, I don't care a thrawneen for money, blast me if I do! Sure I have enough for ye both, an' I'm proud to get such a fine clever boy as yourself

for my little girl. An' what's more, I'm proud ov the great faction that's standin' behind your back, an' that when I meet wid 'em at fair an' market, I can shake hands wid 'em without demanin' myself by it. An' that's what I was lookin' for ever an' always, an' no less than that would plase or satisfy me."

"I'm very thankful to you, Connor Burke," replied Michael, returning the proffered hand-shake with good interest. "An' if we are dacent studdy people—an' no wan that knows us can deny it—sure to-night we are joinin' ourselves to them that's our own aikuils, any day in the year. Listen hether to me now, till I tell you a great saycret intirely. If the Queen's eldest daughter, wid a crown ov goold on her head, was to offer to marry me, the divel fire me if I'd take her in preference to Biddy Burke!"

"Will you b'lieve me, now, what I'm goin' to tell you?" said the old man, bending across the table, as if he too had a great secret to communicate. "I love you, Michaul, 'a *vick machree*! an' every word that you say goes straight to my very heart. 'Tis when I'm dead an' gone, that you'll find out how fond ov you I am. *Ma horp an dieul!** but I love

* *Ma horp an dieul!*—My body to the devil!

you as much as I love Miss Biddy herself." And as if to demonstrate the truth of this assertion, he very affectionately kissed Michael, who by this time was nearly as drunk as he was himself.

"Oh tare an' 'oun's! did I ever think I'd live to see this joyful day?" exclaimed Michael in a burst of maudlin affection. "I'd rather be your son-in-law, Connor Burke, than to be the king ov all Ireland, for I love your daughter, an' I love yourself, an' I'm proud to be joined to you, an' to the dacent woman that owns you."

"You ought to be fond of her, Michaul, for she's fond ov you. An' whin powers ov great bachelors wor comin' here to us, matchmakin' for Miss Biddy, she wouldn't hear to a word from wan ov 'em; an' her word to me ever an' always was: 'Connor Burke,' ses she, 'what'll plase me for my little girl is Michael Daly,' ses she; 'an' if I have that dacent boy for my son-in-law, I'll die in pace, wanst I hear the words sed over 'em,' ses she."

"I wouldn't doubt the *Vanithee*, an' 'tis nothing but what I'd expect from her, for she has a good word for every wan, high an' low. But whisper me this now: why did you refuse me so often? That's a thing I can't make out at all. Was it any wan that put you agin me last Shrove, or the two Shroves

before that? Becase if any wan played me such a dirty thrick, you have only to tell me his name, an' be the mortal blazes, I'll make such smash ov his carkiss, that his own dog wouldn't demane himself be smellin' to him."

"It wasn't any wan that thried to put me agin you at all, but I had my own good rasons for what I done," said Croohoore with drunken gravity.

"An' what wor your rasons, if I might make so free as to ax? Wasn't I comarade good enough for your daughter, an' isn't my faction just as good as your own, any day?"

"Maybe it is, an' maybe it isn't. Arrah, take my advice, you foolish boy, an' hould your tongue. If there's any sinse or gumption at all left in your cract head, you will let well enough alone."

"I won't thin, an' I don't care whether you like it or not," retorted the bridegroom angrily. "An' moreover I'll not part you, till I make you tell me the whole rights ov it."

"Eyeh, my fine fella, is that the way wid you? But sure as you're so mighty anxious to know it, I'll tell you, but 'tis a great saycret intirely, an' I wouldn't like any wan to know it, barrin' yourself an' myself. 'Twas just becace your hair is such a blazin' red, an' along wid that, you're very ugly, an' no ways ginteel!

That's the way ov it, an' now that you hard the news, I hope 'tis plasin' to you."

"Thundher an' 'oun's! is it to my face that you have the impidence to tell me that I'm not ginteel? Faix, 'tis the quare story if I'm not as ginteel any day in the year as Biddy Burke. An' why wouldn't I? When I got five quarthars at Thady Hunt's evenin' school, an' she never got any schoolin' at all. Ginteel, *inagh*! Arrah, hould your whisht, ould man, an' don't let any wan hear you talkin' such foolishness. Don't be aggravatin' me, I tell you."

"An' what div I care whither you're aggravated or not, Michaul Daly?" cried the old man, whose ill-temper had quite gone beyond his own control. "I'm sittin' here on my own flure, an' I don't care the ashes out ov my pipe for you or for your faction, root an' branch. Come now, tell me what fault have you to find wid my little girl, that's wife good enough for your shuparriors. Eyeh! Out wid it, man, whatever it is!"

"I have to say," said Daly, irritated by the contemptuous tone and manner of the old man, "that you often refused me for a wife, thinkin' you had nothing to do but clap your thumb on some great match intirely, but no wan ov that sort ever came next or nigh you. An' now, when you see

no wan else will have her, you want to pass her over on me, like a bad ha'penny. You said a while ago, that powers ov bachelors wor afther her. Erra, Connor Burke, who wor they, or where did they come from? Powers ov bachelors, *inagh!* Oh Lord! An' whin all fruit fails, then welcome haws. But I was the rale *omadhawn*, an' to let a cunnin' ould fox like you, bamboozle me into marryin' your lame disciple, after every other man that you offered her to, refused her."

Drunk as Daly was, yet as soon as he had said the last word he felt that he had gone too far. The old man was silent for a few moments, as if stunned by the audacity of his "dear Michaul," and sat gazing on him with a hard, bitter look on his wizened old face, which, however, the other bore without flinching.

"Lame, is she?" said Croohoore Crussough, slowly and bitterly. "Lame! I'll let you see before long whether she's lame, or whether she isn't. She must step out on the flure this very minnit, fornent all the people here, an' dance a hornpipe, an' then if you don't own that she isn't lame, blast me if ever agin I say a word in her favour!"

He rose from his chair, and walked or rather staggered into the open space in the middle of the kitchen allotted for dancing, announcing that a great insult

had been put upon his daughter by her intended husband, and that she should then and there dance a hornpipe, to prove to him and to all present, that she had no lameness, or other bodily defect. This very singular announcement was received by the greater part of the company with shouts of laughter. They had come there to enjoy themselves, and regarded this strange freak of their host as something got up specially for their entertainment. But those among them who were sufficiently sober to think at all, foresaw that no good would arise from so unusual a proceeding, and considered it an additional proof of the violent temper that had gained for Croohoore Crussough his unenviable *sobriquet*. Mrs. Burke and her son were thunderstruck at the turn things had taken so unexpectedly, and aware of his obstinacy, particularly when he was drunk, they were greatly troubled, and anticipated anything but a pleasant conclusion to the performance of Miss Biddy.

"Come back to your chair, father, an' think ov yourself," entreated Tom. "This isn't the way we ought to entertain our frinds and nabors, an' moreover you're not thratin' Biddy at all well in makin' such a show ov her. For God's sake sit down, an' keep yourself quiet, an' don't make yourself an' your family the laughing-stock of the whole country."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MATCH IS BROKEN OFF.

I say thou hast belied mine innocent child;
Thy slander has gone through and through her heart.

SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. BURKE now came forward weeping, and in great agitation, to add her entreaties to those of her son, and try to allay the storm that had got up so suddenly, but Crochoore Crussough—true to his evil nickname—was just as indifferent to her tears, as he was to Tom's arguments. He pushed them both aside with very little ceremony, and in a loud, imperious voice commanded his daughter to come forward "to the flure" and dance a hornpipe there, to prove to all the assembled company, that what Michael Daly had said of her was "a blasted lie!" All the other dancers sat down instantly, while the fiddler began to play the best hornpipe in his *répertoire*. The Bride advanced

and took her position in the centre of the floor, and truth obliges me, as an impartial chronicler, to admit that she did so without the least appearance of either reluctance or embarrassment, at finding herself in so singular and anomalous a situation. Naturally, every eye was fixed on her, to see how she would get through the strange ordeal prescribed to her by her drunken father. But Miss Biddy's nerve and self-possession were fully equal to the task. While the fiddler was tuning his instrument, and drawing from it a few preliminary chords, she stood alone in the centre of the kitchen, with an easy carriage, and well-balanced *pose*, that would have sufficed to excite the envy of many a theatrical *débutante*. In a moment the fiddler began to play the hornpipe, and with a wave of her hand that was intended as a preliminary flourish, she set off. Whether it was that her vanity was roused by finding herself the object of so much observation, or that she wanted to fix the wavering affections of her intended spouse, it would be hard to tell, but certainly she exerted herself so much, that her performance of the hornpipe was a very brilliant affair. In the slow part she sailed along with the greatest ease, still waving her hand at intervals, and when the air grew quicker, her movements quickened with it, and she executed all the "steps" with a

neatness and precision that would have done credit to any dancing-master from "the kingdom of Kerry," famous as it is for professors of the art. I have seen Fanny Elsler dance a *pas seul*, and Cerito in her celebrated *pas de l'ombre*, and neither of them showed more nerve or *aplomb* than did Miss Biddy on this occasion. Certainly they could not have been more heartily applauded by their audience in Her Majesty's Theatre, than she was while she danced her own *pas seul* in the Bawnmore kitchen, nor did their *pirouettes* and *entrechats* meet with more uproarious admiration. Many and loud were the expressions of applause that greeted her from all sides, and it must be confessed of derision and mockery, as much as of approbation.

"Faix, 'a colleen dhas, 'tis myself that's proud ov you to-night, an' I always knew that you had the stampy in you, if you'd only let it out; more power to you!"

"Begor, Bridgeen asthore, 'tis yourself that knows how to welt the flure in style. Hurroo!"

"Oh, the divil a bit lame she is. Whatever put it into the head ov that foolish Michaul? Blood alive! but that's great footin' intirely."

"Oh, *ma graw se thisca*!* Michaul, you thief ov

* *Ma graw se thisca*!—Success to your legs!

the world, what have you to say for yourself now? When you said that the little girl was lame, 'twas tellin' your dhrams you wor, honest man."

"Yarra, Bridge, I'll lay any money on you. Folly on, 'a *cushla*, the night is airly yet."

During these and similar exclamations, Miss Biddy seemed perfectly unmoved by the sensation she had excited, or if it had any effect on her, it was only to spur her on to renewed exertion. At last she finished her *pas seul* with a low curtsy to the company, which if not as graceful as Elslers', was quite as easy and self-possessed.

All the time that she was dancing, her father had sat perfectly silent, gazing at her performance with a look of stern resolution on his wizened old face. His lanthorn jaws were sucked in until the withered cheeks almost met, and he bent forward leaning on his stick, as if he feared missing any of the "steps" that had won so much applause. When she had finished and made her curtsy, he drew a long breath of relief, and threw himself back in his chair with an air of the greatest triumph.

"Well, Michael Daly, what have you to say for yourself now?" he said, in a tone that he intended to be very cutting and contemptuous. "Can you say now out fornint me, an' fornint all the dacent people

that's in it, that my little girl is lame? Is that dancin' like the dancin' ov a lame person? Answer me that, if it's plasin' to you. I put that big lie down your throat, any way. Dioul!"

"I humbly beg your pardon, Connor Burke," replied the unlucky Michael, whose fright by this time had completely sobered him. "I didn't mane, dear knows, to give you any offence at all, at all. Throth, I'm heart sorry for what I said, an' if you'll only overlook it this wanst, I'll go an' take the vestment out ov hand, that I never agin will say as much as wan untimely word to you."

"Won't you, Michaul Foddha? By St. Bridget I'll take good care you never will, for I'll have no call to you at all, from this day forrid. Now you can make yourself scarce, do you see, for you'll never put a ring on the finger ov my little girl, durin' duration. Put that in your pipe now, my fine fella, an' smoke it."

As Croohoore Crussough said this, he looked round in a very meaning manner, as if defying the company—who all seemed stunned by surprise and consternation at this extraordinary conclusion to the festivities—to contradict him. No one ventured to remonstrate with him, except his wife and son, for as they all said to each other, it was no affair of theirs at all.

"Father, what is all this about?" cried Tom in the greatest dismay. "There was enough ov this jokin' if there was any good in it. Let there be an end ov it, for God's sake! 'Tisn't pleasant nor it isn't dacent."

"There's a dutiful son for ye, nabors," said the drunken old man, swaying unsteadily from side to side. "There's a well-behaved, religious boy, to tell his poor ould father that rared him, that he isn't dacent! Now I'll go bail, that not one ov ye would b'lieve that ov him, only that ye're listenin' to him yerselves."

"I have a right to spake here as well as you, Connor," sobbed the poor wife, who was weeping bitterly. "If you're the little girl's father, I'm her mother, an' I love her just as well as you, though I don't make such a blowing horn ov it. Ah! for the love ov the Blessed Virgin, don't make a show ov the poor child, nor a world's wondher, what she'll be if you folly on wid this foolishness. She's a good, quiet girl, an' never done nothing to bring herself into the mouth ov the public, an' don't you go an' do it this hour ov your life that you ought to have sinse, if ever you're to have it. Michael Daly is a very dacent boy, an' likes the little girl, an' you have no call to fall out wid him o'count ov a foolish word that he said without manin' any harm."

But if Connor Burke rejected so unceremoniously the advice and interference of his only son, whom he both loved and respected, that of his wife, whom he had always treated as if she was vastly his inferior, was not likely to be more graciously received. He was besides, now greatly enraged by her presumption in daring to remonstrate with him, or question his authority, in the presence of all his neighbours.

"The divel take your impidence, you brazen old fagot!" he shouted. "Be the piper that played before Moses, I'm come to a purty pass, when the likes ov you would start up to outface me, standin' on my own flure! Sit down, woman, an' hould your whisht, or I'll make you do it. I'm down in the world surely, when you dar to ballyrag me. Sit down, I tell you agin, an' be quite."

At this moment, a cry was heard outside that at last the priest was coming, and poor Mrs. Burke summoned up fresh courage, hoping that the influence of his pastor would prevail with her husband, although every other had failed. Brute as he was, and shamefully drunk as he was, she still thought that respect for his clergy (which is almost innate in the heart of every Irish peasant) would make him amenable to reason and common sense, even at the eleventh hour. She hurried out to meet the priest, and in a few words

contrived to put him in possession of the facts, and of the difficulty with which he had to deal. He was well acquainted with the crassitude and bad temper of Croohoore Crussough, and in a moment comprehended the state of the case, as if by intuition. A little surprised, and at the same time greatly amused by the strange scene that presented itself to him, he came forward in compliance with the passionate entreaties of Mrs. Burke, to try what he could do to allay the storm.

"Connor, my good fellow," he said, shaking the old man cordially by the hand, "what is amiss? You look as if a little overcome by the heat of the place, and by all the noise; but if you will come out with me into the air for a little, you will recover yourself."

"I'm thankful to your Reverence, sir, but if it's all the same to you, I'd sooner stay where I am," was the ungracious reply of Croohoore.

"Very well; you are the best judge. I'm sorry to be so late, but my horse cast a shoe, and I was obliged to leave him at Carrol's forge, and walk on for the rest of the way. However, here I am at last; better late than never at all, and we can have the marriage ceremony performed at once. Let the young couple come forward," and as he spoke, he drew his stole out of his pocket and put it on.

"I'm intirely obleeged to your Reverence, an' I'm sorry you had so much throuble be my little girl," said Connor Burke doggedly (he was perfectly respectful to the priest, but determined nevertheless to have his own way), "but my mind is changed intirely about this bisness, so it is. You're welcome, father, an' so is all the nabors, heartily welcome to ate, an' drink, an' enjoy yerselves while ever a bit or sup is left, an' *cead millia falthagh*—but that boy ov the Dalys will never put a ring on the finger ov a little girl belongin' to me. My mind is made up on that, all the same as if I was sworn on the Brevary."

"You are in a good humour, Connor, and you want to have a little joke with your priest. But you had the joke, and saw it out, and now there is an end of it. Michael Daly is a good, honest young man, and I am quite sure will make a good husband to your daughter. I never knew a man of his name that was not a good husband, and he will follow the example set him by his family. The young people like each other, and they have a fair prospect of being very happy. He has waited a long time for her, and he deserves to get her."

"By your lave, sir, he does nothing ov the sort; an' if you wor here a while ago, an' hard the frightful

way he dhragged her through his tongue, you'd say the same."

"Forget and forgive, man. You and he didn't mind what ye said to each other over a glass of punch. Ye were both a little hearty, you as well as Michael."

"Hearty! An' so, sir, you say before all the nabors here, that I'm hearty," repeated Burke, his crass obstinacy in no way softened by the genial manner of the priest, but rather strengthened. "*Bathershin!** But whether I'm hearty or no, 'tis all aiquils to Michaul *Foddha*. Let him an' his follyers clear out ov my place at wanst, for I won't give him my girl, or her manes, to plase you, or her mother, or my son Tom. See if I do! An' listen hether to me now, father, hell blow the rap you care about my being disrespected, an' my little girl disrespected, so as you'll make the marriage money out ov us. An' that's what your Reverince is lookin' out for, an' arguin' about, an' sure, small blame to you for that."

A deep flush suffused the countenance of the priest, as he listened to this coarse tirade; but, mastering his disgust and indignation, he said calmly:

* *Bathershin*—May be so.

"Connor, my good fellow, to-morrow, when you are able to think rationally, you will, I am sure, regret having used language to your parish priest, as unbecoming, as it is undeserved."

"Oh, *Ahir dheelish!*"* cried poor Mrs. Burke, "don't lave him, don't give up the cause so soon. Sure, if any wan can get good ov him 'tis yourself. Don't rise out ov him yet, for goodness' sake."

"Not another word shall I say to him," answered the clergyman, "for it would be quite useless. Indeed, I would go very far to serve you or your daughter; but when such very unworthy, mercenary motives are imputed to me, I must remain silent as a matter of course."

"But, *Soggarth 'acushla*, whisper hether. If we could get this man off to bed any way, an' thin have the marriage celebrated fair an' aisy, when he was fast asleep, wouldn't that be the best way?"

"You must not think of such a thing. It would be a desecration of the Sacrament, and a gross deception besides, to which I could not be a party. It would be very injurious to you,—even laying aside the great impropriety of it—for to the last hour of his life he would reproach you for it, and you know what an

* *Ahir dheelish*—Dearest father.

aggravating temper of his own the poor unfortunate man has got. Why, he would make it a standing cause of quarrel with you for ever. Such a proceeding would be very wrong in you, and doubly so in me, so you are not to think of it even."

While the priest and Mrs. Burke were talking in an under-tone, the humour of Croohoore Crussough had once more undergone a complete change, and veered round to the opposite side of the compass. From being defiant and belligerent, he became lachrymose, and full of self-pity for imaginary wrongs. A shower of maudlin tears ran down his withered parchment face, and he looked round with an expression of vacant, silly sorrow, irresistibly comical.

"Why, thin, nabors, isn't this purty thratement that the man ov the house is gettin' out fornint ye, an' none ov ye would have the dacency or the sperrit to take my part, or stand up for me? Ochone! what did I ever do that I'm to be hunted this a way, as if I was a mad dog that had a tin kittle follyin' afther his tail? 'Tis aisy seen that I'm a poor ould man, wid no wan in the 'varsal world to back me at all. Shure if I was a Rooshun, or a Prooshun, or a blackamoor from forrin parts, the Lord save us! what worse, I ax ye all, would be said an' done to me this blessed night? Ochone! Ochone! But I have wan comfort, that I'm dyin' as

innocent as an unborn child, in spite ov all the perjury sworn agin me before judge an' jury. But I forgive all my prosecutors, an' them that swore away my life for goold, an' I hope they'll be sorry for their false swearin', when they hear the little boys cryin' out in the street my last thrue an' dyin' speech. An' I have no more to say, barrin' that I throw myself on the mercy ov the Coort. Oh, wirra! wirra! A long day, my Lord, a long day!"

At the conclusion of this dolorous jeremiad, it was plain that Mr. Burke had arrived at that hazy and helpless state of intoxication, in which he had lost sight of his own identity altogether, and believed himself to be a criminal brought up to receive sentence of death. It was also plain that no more could be done, than get him off to bed as speedily as possible.

"I think, my friends, that the best thing we can all do now, is to leave the house without delay," said the priest, addressing the wedding guests. "The sooner that we go, the sooner will this poor harassed woman be able to look after her unfortunate husband. May God grant her patience! for she is very sorely tried."

All the guests had the good sense to follow this advice, and rose up in a body, preparing to go away.

There was a general bustle, looking about for hats, great-coats, and sticks. Such among them as were tolerably sober, were soon gone, and those who were not, were brought off by their friends in a very summary and uncereemonious fashion. *Michaul Foddha* and his "faction" left the house in great dudgeon, swearing that they would "have it out with him at the coming fair."

While her guests were going off in this ignominious way, poor Mrs. Burke stood at the door, crying very bitterly, and apologising to each person, as he or she passed out, for the abrupt and unpleasant termination of the festivities. In a voice, broken by weeping, she interlarded her apologies by such exclamations as the following :

"Oh, 'a graw machree 'hu! how will I ever be able to show my face agin among the nabors, afther all this shame an' scandal? Oh, my poor little girl! what a holy show was made ov her, this blessed night? Och mavrone! Was there ever a poor misfortunate woman had such a heavy cross to carry as what I have? hard an' heavy it is, an' the Man above knows that well. But He'll gi' me patience to folly His holy will now, as He did ever an' always, thanks be to His name! An' to hear my own husband, an' the father ov my children, ballyrag me before all

the dacent people, as if I was nothing but the dirt undher his fut. Oh, Queen ov Consolation! you know whether I deserved that from the man ov my house, an' that I'm married to nearly forty year. An' what harm what he said to myself, sure I'm well used to the rough side ov his tongue, but my poor innocent child will be in the mouth ov the public, without rhyme or rason. Ah, thin, Connor Burke, 'tis no admiration that people do be talkin' ov you, an' if you never gave 'em cause before, fake an' sure, you done it to-night in a way that'll be spoke ov to your dyin' day. Oh vo! vo!" and so on *ad infinitum*.

The priest remained after all the rest were gone, and did all he could to comfort the poor woman. The three frightened girls were huddled together in a distant corner, and Tom stood with his back to the fire, staring about him in a bewildered sort of way, and hardly able to realise the total collapse of all his harmless plotting. Tom knew nothing of poetry, beyond a few nursery rhymes, and street ballads, but with the great poet of his own class, who had well known all its sorrows and simple joys, he could say:

"The best laid schemes of mice an' men
Gang aft agley."

Croohoore Crussough himself—now more than

ever deserving of his nickname—sat propped up against the wall by the arm of the settle, looking the very personification of sodden, stupid intoxication.

Such was the end of Miss Biddy Burke's "wedding;" and whether it ended in a semi-tragedy, or a screaming farce, I leave my readers to judge for themselves. As might be expected, the affair was the subject of very general conversation, at fair and market, in the field, and at the fireside, all through the country for many a long day. Endless were the jokes to which it gave rise; and it was celebrated in song, as well as in story, for the "janious" of the district made it the subject of a ballad, which, though rather defective in grammar and versification, met nevertheless with great applause. The refrain in particular was much admired, and regarded as both witty and appropriate:

Success to Michaul, for 'twas he lost the race,
And success to the marriage that never took place.

NOTE.—This and the preceding chapter are not altogether imaginary. The incidents related in them occurred in a remote part of the county of Clare, and were related to the author by the late Rev. T. Kelly, P.P. and vicar-general of the diocese of Killaloe, who was the clergyman sent for to celebrate the marriage ceremony, but not suffered to do it, as shown exactly in the text.

CHAPTER IX.

OONAGH LEAVES BAWNMORE.

"But this I know, where'er I go,
That there has past a glory from the earth."

WORDSWORTH.

WHETHER Croohoore Crussough was or was not ashamed of the foolish way in which he had thrown over a good husband for his unattractive daughter, could not be known, for he kept his own counsel on the subject, and none of his family dared bring him to task for it. However, no way disheartened by the ridiculous failure of his last attempt at matchmaking, he very soon set to work again in another direction, as if to show the obnoxious Michael that he was finally dismissed, and without chance of a recall. He hunted up another swain who lived in a distant parish, and after the usual amount of haggling and bargaining, the match was made, and Miss Biddy's

wedding-day was once more fixed. With much native good sense, and the memory of the former *fiasco* fresh in her mind, she stoutly declared that she would have no wedding; that she had had one, and was in no way proud of it; and that she preferred being married at the parish chapel early in the morning, and taking leave of her family immediately after the marriage ceremony was performed, set off with her husband for her new home. In this very wise resolution she was strenuously supported both by her mother and Tom, who were determined to avoid, if possible, any second edition of the disgraceful scene that had been enacted on the former occasion. For once in his life the old man was amenable to reason, professing himself to be heartily disgusted with weddings, that he said were only a foolish waste of money that could be more profitably spent in some other way.

But the punishment of his drunken folly was yet to come home to him, and a very heavy one it proved to be. The very day after Miss Biddy was "wooded an' married an' a'," he sent Tom off once more to the Cahills, with full instructions to have everything finally arranged for the marriage of Susie with Bryan Oge. To his great surprise, Tom did not meet with the hearty welcome from the Cahill family, that he had calculated on. Their greetings were cold and

restrained, and in a very unmistakable manner they gave him what is called "the cold shoulder," and put aside all his attempts at putting matters on the old footing, in a way so very decided, that he could not possibly misunderstand it. He was quick enough to see that his errand would be a fruitless one, and that it would answer no good purpose to prolong his visit. He came away very soon, and was accompanied part of his way home by Bryan Oge, who took that opportunity of telling him, that there could be no further matchmaking between them, and added that after the late exhibition that had taken place, he could not possibly consent to be the son-in-law of such a violent man as Croohoore Crussough, who deserved his opprobrious nickname better than any man he ever knew. Such a father-in-law he could never endure, no, not if his daughter were twice as pretty, and he had ten times as much money to give her!

This was bad news to bring back to Bawnmore, and on hearing it, old Connor stormed and raged like a perfect lunatic, and tormented and worried his wretched family, until they were almost weary of their lives. But even worse news was still to come. In a few days, Bryan Oge was married to one of Matt Hassett's "yalla mullotts!" There was a roaring wedding at Matt's, to which none of the Burkes were

invited, on account of the long-standing feud between the two families, and everything passed off there as pleasantly and smoothly as it was possible. All who were there, said it was the gayest and pleasantest wedding that had been in the parish, within the memory of man. Human nature could not stand this, at least such human nature as old Croohoore was compounded of, and he was obliged to betake himself to his bed, really ill from sheer vexation and disappointment. That he should have lost for his "little girl" the best match in the whole country, just when it was almost in his grasp, was very trying, but that this good match should have been snapped up before his very eyes, by his arch enemy, was perfectly heartrending. It by no means mended matters to reflect, that this slight to his daughter, and mortification to himself, were caused by his own ungovernable temper, and bitter, injurious tongue.

At the end of a week Connor Burke left his bed, and to the great surprise of his family, in better humour than they had ventured to expect. However, he abused the whole Cahill family from first to last, and not only them, but all their forefathers, and relatives, who had been dead time out of mind, with a bitterness and acrimony that could not be easily matched. When he had exhausted his vocabulary

of abuse on the subject of the treachery and depravity of the Cahills and Hassetts *en masse*, he then declared that "there was as good fish in the say as ever come out ov it," and that any man having a pretty girl, and a fistful of bank-notes to give her on her wedding-day, to back up her beauty, need not be in any doubt of being able to provide handsomely for her. From all this boasting, his wife and children came to the conclusion, that no way daunted by his former failure at matchmaking, he was determined on trying his luck at it a second time. He was also resolved to let the Cahills and Hassetts see that they should not have an opportunity "of crowing over him;" they had their turn, and he would have his, and they should find out that he would get such a match for his little girl, as would make their livers turn green with envy!

Where there is a will there is a way, is a good old proverb, and Connor Burke's will being of the strongest, he very soon found a way to attain the object of his great desire.

One morning when the Shrovetide was almost at its close, the old man, accompanied by his son and daughter, went to the neighbouring town to transact business of various kind. No one remained at home

but Mrs. Burke, Oonagh, and a stout country girl that had been engaged after Miss Biddy's marriage to do the coarse work of the dairy and kitchen. On the approach of evening the two young women went out to milk the cows, while the elder one employed herself preparing the evening meal for the family. When all this necessary work was finished, evening had set in, and the old man came home alone. For a wonder, he was not drunk, nor even excited by drink in the least degree; he had merely taken what sufficed to put him into good humour with himself, and with the rest of the world.

"Where are the childher?" asked his wife when, after having divested himself of his big frieze *loody*, he sat down in his usual seat by a good fire.

"Oh, the childher is all right; never you fear about that, 'a *vanithee*. As soon as my own bisness was done, I thought it best to come home, an' tell you ov the sthranger that's comin' home wid Tom an' Shusy by-an'-by."

"A sthranger comin' here wid Tom an' Shusy! Who is he? Some ould frind, I'm thinkin'."

"Oh, begor, you never made a worse guess in all your born days. Some ould frind, *inagh*! Erra, woman alive, what 'ud be bringin' ould min the last

week ov the Shrove to a house where there's a purty girl?" and as he said this, he winked at his wife in a very significant manner.

"I suppose 'tis a bachelor for Shusy. An' now as I guessed it, you may as well tell me who he is."

"The sorra wan ov me will tell you, till you seen him walkin' in the dure to you, an' he's worth lookin' at, I'll go bail. But death alive, woman, be smart wid the supper, for I'm rale famished wid the hunger, an' we won't wait for them, as they wor to have some delay in town. They can get their own supper when they come."

When he had satisfied his hunger, he resumed his seat in the chimney corner, and began smoking his pipe in great good humour. After what he called "a few blasts," he called Oonagh, and made her sit down beside him.

"How would you like to be married, Oonagh? Sure 'tis but fair that you'd get your chance as well as the rest."

"Thanks to you, Connor, for your good wishes; but, for the present, I'd rather stay as I am," replied Oonagh.

"Oyeh, that's what all the young girls do be sayin', but as soon as the right man comes to the

fore, they sing a song ov a different tune altogether. Oonagh, you're the nearest relation I have in the world outside ov my own childher, an' now that the two girls will be provided for, I'll set about match-makin' for you; see if I don't! An' I'll give you a noble fine weddin', the same that I gave them. That the ould dhunnus may saize me, neck an' crop, if I don't!"

"But you're not tellin' us the name ov the bachelor that's comin' to-night, an' we all dyin' to hear it."

"Faix, he's a grand bachelor intirely, sorra lie in it. They may talk ov Bryan Oge! Yarra, Bryan an' all the Cahills that ever stud at his back aren't worth the ashes ov this ould *dhudeen* in my hand, compared wid the boy that's comin' coortin' here to-night!"

"Did I ever see him before?" demanded his wife.

"Maybe you did, an' maybe you didn't; sure 'tis all wan. If you never saw him before, you'll see him to-night, an' I can tell you that if you searched the three baronies from ind to ind, you wouldn't find a cleverer or a brighter boy. An' he has a noble fine farm, an' a splinded slated house on it. What do you say to that now, 'a *vanithee*?"

"What have I to say, barrin' that 'tis very good?"

Still, if he had as much more, I'd not consint that the poor child would be made to marry him if she don't like him."

"Oh, av coorse, av coorse! that's only reasonable an' fair," he answered in high good-humour. "Shusy likes him well enough, an' so will you when you see him. An' now, Oonagh *asthore*, let you an' Mary be off, an' finish the bisness for the night. Ye have to do Shusy's share as well as yer own, for 'tis little work she'll do when she comes home, as she'll have a nice bachelor to be discoorsin' wid her," and the old man laughed loudly at his own joke.

Oonagh and Mary accordingly went off to the dairy, which was at some little distance from the dwelling-house, and for some time were very busy making all things there right for the following morning. When all was done they returned to the house, and Oonagh went to the little bedroom that she shared with Susie, to wash her hands, smooth her rumpled hair, and make herself fit to appear before the new "bachelor."

While thus employed, she heard the sound of voices as if approaching the house, and opening the window noiselessly she saw three persons coming on. One of them was Tom Burke, leading a horse by the bridle; he turned off in the direction of the stable,

leaving the others, who were side by side, to come on without him. The next moment a voice—the lowest tone of which had ever thrilled through her heart—broke the silence. There was no mistaking that voice—one so dearly loved, and never forgotten—and almost fainting from surprise and emotion, she leant heavily against the wall.

“An’ so, Miss Shusy, *’a chora machree*, you never could discriminate when you left home this mornin’, who it was that would have the mellifluous delight ov comin’ here to-night to confabulate wid you?”

“No, indeed,” replied the fresh young voice of Susie Burke; “an’ when my father brought you up to me in the shop when I was buyin’ the hankercher, I was greatly surprised.”

“Well, you see, darlin’, I ought by rights to have solaced myself be payin’ my respects to you, for ever since I first experienced the great enticements ov your beauty and agreeable variations, I enthered into a strict declaration wid my own mind, that I never would go coortin’ to any other girl durin’ duration. Faix, you conglomerated my brains, an’ wounded my heart, so, that I couldn’t help lovin’ you, the rogue ov the world that you are! An’ now if you’ll only say the word, an’ admit that you feel some racicroprocity in your own mind towards me, I’m

ready—though indeed I never was much of a marryin' man—to run my head into the noose for your sake. 'Tis a fact, upon my reputation."

"But I always thought that yourself an' Oonagh MacDermott always liked wan another, an' I wouldn't go betune ye, or do anything that would fret her, for the whole world."

"Did Oonagh tell you that?"

"Oh! never a word did she say to me about you, or about any other boy either. But I hard it from other people, an' even that ye wor handfasted together."

"Well, you hard what was a blazin' lie. I never had anything to say to that girl, nor she to me, be this book," and the unprincipled rascal kissed with a loud smack an old tattered ballad-book that he took out of his pocket.

"It was a shame to tell such a lie," said the simple girl. "But if it was thrue itself, she's not the girl that would talk ov such a thing to any wan, barrin' that it might be to her mother, if she was livin'. She's a silent kind ov girl in herself, is Oonagh, an' 'tis not aisy to know what's in her mind. But for all that, I love her very dearly, an' I wouldn't grieve her on any account. She has grief enough, dear knows, on her poor heart, without my addin' more to it."

“ Oh ! you have no call to throuble yourself about her at all, or have any obnoxious reproaches in your own mind, in regard ov *her*. Oonagh is a very nice young woman, an’ her father was a dacent man, an’ they always had a welcome for me whenever I wint to Ballycross. They knew that I was altogether shuparior to the low set ov clodhoppers that’s goin’ these times, that can’t discriminate a word ov the humanities or the classics. That was all, darlin’, upon my reputation.”

“ But I hard, too, about the widda woman in town that you wor pullin’ a cord wid. I mane the woman that has the pawn-office in High Street.”

“ Well, now, Miss Shusy, that’s ralely good ! ” he cried, with a laugh that was half amusement and half scorn. “ Is it me to be pullin’ a cord wid the likes ov *her* ? I wouldn’t contaminate myself be touchin’ her wid the tongs. The widda woman that could aisy be my mother ! It was given up to me to be the finest scholar in Misther O’Toole’s seminary, both in langwidges an’ parsin’, not to talk at all ov the humanities, or polite larnin’ ; an’ do you think I’d demane myself be entherin’ into matrimonial bonds wid that ould pawnbrokin’ witch ? Listen hether to me, now, ‘ a *cushla machree*, an’ you may b’lieve me or not, just as you like. Be the virtue

ov this oath," here the old ballad-book was again brought into requisition, "I'd rather have you for my wife, wid no fortune but the accoutrements you stand in this minnit, than either Oonagh or the widda woman, if they wor dhressed wid elaboration in the grandest habiliments. 'Tisn't that I'd compare Oonagh MacDermott any day in the year to that ould rat-thrap in the pawn-office. She's a rale nice girl, an' a purty girl, an' has great philanthropy an' joculariry intirely, but somehow, herself an' myself didn't fancy wan another at all."

"She's all that, an' the same as my own sisther to me," said Susie tenderly. "Every wan that knows her, loves an' likes her, an' she deserves nothing else from any wan. 'Tis the pity ov the world that she isn't in her own house, instead ov bein' on any wan's flure." What else the loyal, loving-hearted girl might have said was inaudible, as she and her companion had by that time passed out of hearing, and into the house.

There was a short interval of profound silence, as Oonagh remained leaning against the wall, during which her heart was wrung by the most exquisite suffering. She had imagined all its wounds had been healed, and were now become callous, and here they were opened up afresh, and bleeding from every pore.

She could have laid down her life for this man. She had loved him in spite of all his falsehood and unworthiness, and though she despised herself for her weakness, she loved him still. He had in the old days cast some unholy glamour over her soul, she verily believed, and now he had cast the same glamour over the soul of the innocent young creature, who, though she had once called him a fool, could not resist the fascination of his handsome face, and the spell of his oily, persuasive tongue, no more than she had done herself, when she had thought he was devoted to her heart and soul.

In her heart she could not blame Susie, and she did not. How could any woman on whom he cast his spells, help loving him? And it was Susie's fate to love him, and to be his wife! It was foretold by the Dumb Cake, and it was decreed that it should come to pass. It was the second prediction of the dream on that memorable Hallow Eve, that would be verified. Judy had been married to the man *she* had dreamed of, and in a few days Susie would be married to the man of *her* dream. But where was the fair-haired young priest, saying mass in a church, who was the man of her own dream? He would appear no doubt at the proper time, whatever influence he was to have upon her future life. The Irish, like

all imaginative people, or people that have an Oriental origin, are all more or less fatalists, and Oonagh was no exception to the rest of her class.

She could not tell how long she had remained leaning against the wall; it might have been as many moments, or it might have been as many years. She could not reckon it, for she felt as if time had stood still, or as if her heart had ceased to beat. At last she was roused by the voice of the new servant outside, calling the fowls to put them up for the night. Oonagh stood at the window, and said to her in a low voice:

"Mary, I have a great headache intirely, an' I'm in dhread I never could stand the heat and noise ov the place outside to-night. If any wan axes for me, just say that I was obleeged to go to bed with a splittin' headache. You'll do this for me, Mary *asthore*?"

"To be sure I will, an' welcome," answered the cheerful voice of Mary. "An' don't be in any hurry gettin' up in the mornin'; sure herself is an airly riser, and she'll gi' me an' Shusy a helping hand with the cows; so for your life don't lave out the bed, an' I'll bile the kittle airly, an' bring you in a cup ov strong tay."

Poor forsaken, sorrowful Oonagh went to bed, but not to sleep. There was no sleep that night to shed its gracious dew upon her heart. In a few hours Susie came softly in, and, after saying her prayers, silently undressed and lay down by her side. The loving little thing wound her arms round her companion, and asked how she felt, and if her head was better; and after a little while when she fell asleep, it was with her head pillowed on Oonagh's breast.

But through the long hours of that weary night no sleep came to give a moment's oblivion to the suffering girl. She felt as if her heart would burst from her bosom, and as if all the blood in her veins had turned into liquid fire. She longed, as she had never longed before, to see the first faint glimpse of the dawn, that she may be up and away, and leave that house and her faithless lover far behind her. She never asked herself where she was to go, or what was to become of her. She could only remember that the world was wide, and that she was young and strong, and able to earn her bread wherever she went. All she cared for was to escape to some distant place, where her heart would not be wrung by the sound of any voices and the sight of any faces that were still but too dear to her. She despised the man, but still

she loved him. She could not help it, any more than she could help breathing.

But what will Love's exalting not go through,
Till long neglect, and utter selfishness,
Shame the fond pride it takes in its distress.

I know that there are those who in reading this, will entertain a very low opinion of my poor Oonagh. They will say she was a coward, and wanting in womanly pride when she ran away from her false lover, instead of staying to brave him, and wither his heart by her contempt and scorn. But this was just the thing that she never once thought of doing; she could not remain to see him make love to her unconscious rival, and see him married to her in a few days. And if she remained, it might come to pass—for she could not be sure of herself—that she would learn to hate Susie, the soft, loving little thing who had always been like a sister to her, who had sprung up to meet her with outstretched arms when she had come to that house sorrowful, and footsore, and poor! No, she would not remain to mar Susie's happiness, or lessen, by even a shade, the great love that had always been between them, and always should be, whatever happened. She would go away, and her bleeding heart and sorrowful face should not cast their gloom on the

sunshine that had burst on the innocent young creature's life. John Molloy might afflict her in the years to come when she was his wife—Oonagh now knew that was not at all unlikely—and the world might afflict her, but never should sorrow or pain come to her from the hand of her childhood's friend.

She slipped out of bed without awaking Susie, and dressed herself by the first gray light of the early spring morning. Then, having said her morning prayers, she took up her little bundle once more, and, without trusting herself to look at the sleeping girl, passed out into the kitchen, where she found Mrs. Burke, who was a very early riser. The good woman stared in unfeigned astonishment when she saw the girl evidently prepared for setting out on a journey.

"Oh, blessed saints! is it Oenagh I have here! Wisha, what brings you out so airly, ready for the road?"

"I had some news last night that makes me go," replied Oonagh evasively.

"I suppose 'twas that sudden news that gave you the bad head-ache last night. But you can't go, *asthore*, for it's just goin' to rain, an' I'm in dhread it will be wet for the rest ov the day. The sky looks very dark intirely."

"So itself, 'a *vanithee*; I must go."

"I suppose your aunt, Mrs. Clancy, is taken suddent; so I won't say any more to stop you. But wait till afther breakfast, an' Tom can get the cart ready, an' bring you there."

"God bless you for thinkin' ov it, but I'd be in dhread to wait so long."

"Well, if you won't wait for the breakfast, you must take it wid you;" and the good-hearted woman took down two large squares of girdle bread from the dresser, and then running out to the dairy, soon returned with a bottle of milk well corked. These she packed deftly in a small basket, and put it into Oonagh's hand. She next brought a woollen shawl out of her own room, which she threw over the girl's head to save her from the rain, and lastly she put a pound-note into the basket.

"There's more than this due to you, 'a rá geál, but 'tis all I have myself, an' I don't like wakin' the ould man for more. But it might be enough while you're away. You must be home very soon, for Shusy's match was made last night, an' we're to have the weddin' in another week, plase God. If you're not back agin be that time, Oonagh, what is Shusy to do for a bridesmaid, an' what will I do for a comrade, when she's gone from me?"

"I can't say if I can be home in time for the wed-

din' ; but sure if I'm not, you can tell poor Shusy that I wish her every sort ov good luck an' happiness from the core ov my heart," said Oonagh with a quivering lip. "An' tell her I'm sorry I could not say good-bye to her, in dhread ov wakin' her, but that I love her dearly all the same."

"I'll give her all your lovin' messages, you may be sure, an' they won't lose anything in the tellin'. An' now, child, good-bye, for, as you're bint on goin', the sooner you go the better, before the rain comes down in rale airnest."

The kind motherly woman kissed the girl tenderly, and the two parted, never to meet on earth again !

Oonagh took her bundle in the one hand, and good Mrs. Burke's basket in the other, and left Bawnmore with bare feet, as she had entered it, and without having the least idea of where she would go, or under what roof she was to find shelter for the night. But she had a strong will, and a brave heart, and her confidence in the mercy and goodness of God never failed her.

When she came to the stable where her dog, Bran, slept in a warm bed of straw under the manger, she opened the door, and called him to follow her ; and these two fast friends, in the cold gray light of the early morning, and under a drizzling rain that was

growing heavier every moment, set off once more upon their travels. But whatever hardships she suffered, she drew a long breath of relief, when she left Bawnmore far behind her.

CHAPTER X.

THE YEAR 1847.

That was a time to try the souls of men,
Make the glad spirit thoughtful once again,
Wring drops of Pity's dew from hearts of stone,
Weeping for others' woes, as well as for their own.

WE have now come to one of the most melancholy periods in the sad annals of Ireland, the summer of the year 1847. The potato, the chief and almost the only food of an over-abundant population, had failed considerably in the harvest of the preceding year. But the sanguine and elastic nature of the people was not to be daunted by one bad season, and with patient labour and hopeful spirit they planted the national root once more, taking great pains to have the ground well manured, and properly tilled, as well as having the best and soundest seed to put into it. What anxious hearts there were, that

watched the planting of what should suffice for the food of the ensuing year, and the luxuriant growth that sprang up, promising a most abundant harvest ! What dull eyes brightened up, and what pale cheeks flushed with joyful hope, to see the green stalks grow stronger and higher as the summer advanced, until at last the beautiful peach-coloured blossoms expanded to the sunshine ! All classes alike rejoiced at the pleasant sight presented by the healthy-looking potato-fields all over the country ; the landlord, who knew that a second year's failure meant reduced rent, or none at all ; the tiller of the soil, who knew that it meant half-rations for his family, and great falling off in his accounts on gale day ; and the very poor, who knew that a failure in the potato crop meant for them absolute starvation. It was no wonder, then, that all classes alike rejoiced at the favourable aspect of the crop on which so much depended, and, taking heart once more, regarded the future with hopeful cheerfulness.

But a black thunder-cloud hung over the doomed land, which, suddenly bursting, swept in its irresistible course over the afflicted and suffering people, taking from them not only the fruit of their hard labours, but hope, and health, and even life itself. In a few days—in many places in one night—the green stalks first withered, and then blackened, while the tubers under

them rotted, poisoning the sweet air of summer by a most sickening and offensive odour. The potato disease had appeared again, but with greater severity in its effects, and more widely spread than in the previous year. From the rich man's field of many acres down to the little patch behind the cottier's cabin, the plague had manifested itself with terrible impartiality. After all their bright anticipations, their patient toil, their many privations, cheerfully borne in the faith of a better time to come, the Irish people found themselves, in the autumn of 1847, face to face with the gaunt spectre of the great Famine, and then one loud wail, one exceeding bitter cry of desolation and despair rose up to heaven throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Ah, Heaven! Who that was old enough at "the time of the Famine" to remember it, can ever put its sorrowful, agonising memories out of his heart? They who talk in a carping and slighting spirit of the Irish people, who maintain that nothing good can come out of that second Nazareth, Ireland, would do well to look in a calm, dispassionate spirit on the records of that most awful and miserable time; when whole districts were depopulated by sheer hunger; when the perishing creatures, who had been evicted from their little holdings, lay down to die by the roadside un-

complainingly, or crowded, when dying, into the poor-houses, because *there* a coffin would be provided for their wasted remains. And oh, dear God! how patient they were! There was, in the time of the Famine, no outrage! There was no crime of more than the ordinary character, no breaking open provision stores, no burglaries or highway robberies. Peaceful travellers went on their own errands through town and country without the least molestation; and the general traffic and business of the country went on as usual, though it was not much, for no one had money for anything but food, and very little even for that. There was no disorder of any kind, no disturbance that would call for any special interference by the authorities. It was as if, when the last remnant of their food melted away before their eyes, all action and energy were crushed out of the wretched people; and as if their minds and souls were paralysed and dead before their bodies succumbed to the slow, agonising death of famine. It might well have been said of them, in the words of Felicia Hemans :

Silently they die,
Like streams that shrink from summer's burning eye.

They were as if stunned and dazed by the magnitude of the awful calamity that had overwhelmed them; a

calamity for which even the elastic Celtic nature could discover no remedy, in which it could not find the least alleviation, nor upon which it could rest the faintest hope. One feeling alone remained alive in the souls of the people, one thought that made their misery endurable, suffering with sublime endurance, and dying with patient resignation. This one sentiment was religion! The Irish peasant rarely loses his faith in God, and childlike trust in His merciful omnipotence, and it is this which enables him to endure a life of poverty and toil with patient cheerfulness, and to face death with serene composure.

But it was not the very poor alone who suffered from the ruin caused by the blight in the potatoes, though, as a matter of course, they were the first to suffer. The farmers, and the shopkeepers, and the tradesmen, whose business was ruined for want of customers, and the great accumulation of bad debts that could never be recovered; and, lastly, the landed proprietors, whose tenants had become hopelessly insolvent, and whose lands, impoverished and untilled, were like a howling wilderness. To this last class, with very few exceptions, the ruin, if it had come more slowly, did not come the less surely or pitilessly. They made a gallant stand, and fought a long and stubborn battle with adverse fortune, but it was only

a forlorn hope from which few escaped unhurt. The tide that ran against them was too strong, and, unable to breast it, they were swept away. The Encumbered Estates Court made short work with the greater number of them, while those who, by the most desperate efforts, kept their heads above water, were hardly in much better case. They were so reduced in means, so cruelly crippled in every way, that they could scarcely hope to retrieve within their own lifetime. They had, however, through all struggles and privations, one great comfort: they had saved the old acres, and the roofs under which they were born, from coming under the hammer of "the Court," and their children would possess them in the time to come, when they themselves should have passed away!

Then began the evictions! They began in those wretched districts where the famine fiend reigned supreme; first singly, then swelling in numbers, until at last the miserable people, starved and naked, were driven from the poor cabins that were dear to them, for they represented *home*, either to beg, or enter the union workhouse, as it pleased them best to do. What scenes of woe and horror were then enacted under the sunny skies of those terrible summers; what cries of sorrow and despair, of unspeakable suffering, were sent up to the great Throne from

breaking hearts who had no relief to expect but in the awful peace of death, and no shelter but an unhonoured pauper's grave! It was, in truth, a very dreadful time in the south and west of Ireland; so dreadful that no language can adequately describe its horror, and not so remote but that many still living can remember it well; and their hearts ache, and their thoughts become very sad and solemn, whenever the memory of it comes back upon them.

For those evictions the landlords, of course, came in for a large share of the blame and obloquy, and this, as I humbly conceive, without sufficient cause. There were, no doubt, many cases of unnecessary harshness and abuse of power, but, in the aggregate, the landowners had scarcely any choice but to do exactly as they did. Their properties were swamped by a pauper multitude that had squatted down upon them. So very poor were these people, that even in good times they could only live, to use their own expression, "from hand to mouth," and when the bad time came they were, as might have been expected, utterly broken and beggared. They could neither pay the rent for their lands, nor cultivate them even in the rudest manner, so that they became a succession of barren wastes. And, as if the loss of his rent were not enough, the landlord had to pay the poor's-rate of

those people, in addition to his own. To put them off his estate had become with him not merely a matter of choice, but one of absolute necessity. He had no other option, if he did not choose to sink himself and his family down to their level, and become as poor as they were. It was the imperative instinct of self-preservation; the instinct of one swimming for his life, who must perforce cast off with a determined hand the drowning comrade who clutches him with so convulsive a clasp that both are in danger of being drowned. It is a question of life or death, and this inexorable instinct of self-preservation compels him to save his own life at all risks, and leave his unfortunate companion to his inevitable fate.

It was thus with the Irish landlords at the time of the Famine, at least with the great majority, whose estates were not very large, and, in most instances, heavily encumbered. They had—if they hoped to survive the storm—to shake themselves free from the grasp of the drowning men who were pulling them down. They saw themselves drifting gradually into the vortex of the Encumbered Court; they could not meet their own engagements or pay their necessary household expenses but with the utmost difficulty; their creditors were clamouring at their gates, and they would not expect help from their friends or neigh-

bours, for all were equally involved in one huge and general ruin.

Among the landlords upon whom the calamity of this most calamitous time pressed most heavily, was Dominic Dillon, of Castle Cloyne. His estate, at no time in a very flourishing condition, and encumbered by a weight of debt that was always steadily progressing, was now utterly swamped beyond all hope of recovery. Mr. Dillon resigned his seat in Parliament—that empty honour he had so long coveted, and that had so greatly added to his heavy burden of debt!—and returned home to see what could be done towards mitigating, if he could not altogether avert, the ruin that was hanging over him and his family. He and his son set to work—this time in sad and sober earnest—but anything they could do was all in vain. But not without a hard struggle did they give up the fight. Not without many a bitter pang did their proud hearts behold the final extinction of all that was valuable and dear to them, and which henceforth could be nothing more than a memory. They must now stand aside, while the broad acres that had come down to, them from many fathers, and through many hundred years, were to be brought under the miserable hammer of the Encumbered Court, and sold to the highest and best bidder.

Even amid all his trouble—and in truth it was very great—Mr. Dillon indulged the hope that from the wreck of his fortune, when all the encumbrances should be paid off, there would remain some provision for his old age, and for the future of his daughter. He had already settled the future of his son ; Hyacinth was to enter the army. Mr. Dillon had still sufficient interest with the ministry he had so steadily supported, to be sure of getting a commission for his boy. The young man himself had fifty pounds a year left him by his godmother, and this sum, though small, would in addition to his pay enable him with economy to live like an officer and a gentleman. Poor Hyacinth ! this fifty pounds a year was hitherto spent on horses and dogs, and now it was the chief staff on which he should lean, beginning his life on his own account.

It was a very sad and bitter day for those unfortunate gentlemen—the bankrupt father and the disinherited son—when they heard that the day was actually named on which the estate of Castle Cloyne was to be sold in the office of the Encumbered Court in Dublin. Next morning Hyacinth set off to be present at the sale, in the vain hope that he might be able to do *something*, he could not tell what, that would help him to save some little surplus out of the wreck, before the ship finally went down. Any-

way, he had a morbid wish to keep his place on the deck of the old craft, as long as a plank of her held together. When he came back, the auction of the cattle and household furniture was to take place, and then some inexpensive, quiet home was to be found, where he could settle his father and sister before he left home finally.

It was a melancholy and inglorious ending for the proud old house of Castle Cloyne; but many as proud fell to pieces that miserable time, and many as stately a tree was torn up by the roots. But the calamity was too general and too widely spread for any individual case to excite more than a passing expression of wonder and regret. However, there were not wanting those who sorrowed for the old gentry, and thought that the world must surely be coming to an end, when they were so utterly rooted out of the land in which they had been established for centuries; others stoutly maintained that the system which had tolerated them so long, was as unwholesome as it was obsolete, and that the new blood and fresh energy that had replaced them all over the country, would vastly serve to advance its real interests, and develop its numerous and latent resources. But the peasantry—such of them as survived the great Famine—still clung to the “ould stock,” still had a kind word and a tender

memory for those whom the world no longer delighted to honour, viewing those who succeeded them with a distrust and surly civility that the lapse of many years could hardly tone down, or smooth away. For Paddy, no matter how poor he may be, is yet thoroughly an aristocrat. He loves a drop of good blood, and respects long descent as no man in any other part of the world will do: and, in an equal ratio, he intensely dislikes new people, and self-made men, holding "showneens" and "half sirs" in the most absolute scorn and contempt.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST OF THE DILLONS.

Thy race is run.
For thee there is no future more !—for thee
No evil-boding hour can knell again !

SCHILLER.

SHAKESPEARE says, that sorrows come not in single spies, but in battalions, and of this saying of the great master, the Dillons were now to experience the truth. As if the loss of their property and the ruin that had overwhelmed them were not enough, still more was to be added to their “crown of sorrow.” The last of the two trustees in whom Miss Dillon’s fortune—inherited from her mother—had been invested, became a bankrupt. He had speculated largely with this and other moneys with which he had been entrusted, and, in the wretched condition to which the country was reduced, his speculations as a matter of course failed signally ;

and, before the day of hearing before the judge of the Bankruptcy Court, he had fled the country, leaving no assets whatever behind him.

This was a terrible blow, and the old man felt it to the core of his afflicted heart. His poor Grace, his motherless, darling girl, his one ewe-lamb, was a beggar, and if something could not be saved out of the proceeds of the sale, what was to become of her? Five thousand pounds were not of so much consequence once upon a time to the master of Castle Cloyne as that he should break his heart about it; but that old time was past and gone, and now it was a sum of vast importance in his eyes, for while it existed, it stood between his child and absolute want. It was now gone, and she was a pauper. It was no wonder that the heart of the old man failed him at last, and that in one week twenty years seemed to have been added to his age.

A few days before that one appointed for the Castle Cloyne auction, Father O'Rafferty prevailed on the unfortunate gentleman to leave it, and take up his abode with him, until a suitable home could be provided for him. His daughter remained behind for a few days, to arrange some necessary business, and pack up the few things that the ruined family could call their own. At such a time there were many things to be done that a woman's hand alone could do. As soon

as this task was accomplished, Grace was to follow her father to the priest's house.

Like one in a terrible dream did Dominic Dillon feel when he got into his own carriage for the last time. He leant on his daughter's arm going down the steps of the hall-door, and still he put a great constraint on his feelings, for though the tears, which Grace could not restrain, were streaming down her face, he appeared to be quite unmoved. At the foot of the steps were the priest and Pat Flanagan, waiting to put him into the carriage, while the servants and "followers," whose name is legion, were all standing about to see the last of the "ould masther." Some were weeping silently, and all showed in the most unmistakable manner their sympathy and regret for the fallen fortunes of the house that had so long sheltered and befriended them. The men were silent, as men usually are under the influence of powerful emotions, but the women, more demonstrative, showed their grief in a more clamorous fashion, giving vent to their feelings, some in English and some in Irish, but all in language full of rough eloquence, and of tender, passionate sorrow.

"An' here's the ind ov the grand ould family that's in Castle Cloyne ever since grass grew or wather ran. Oh, vo! vo! Warm wor their hearts, an' open their

hands, an' many a poor sowl was warmed an' fed undher their roof, an' no questions wor ever axed as to what brought 'em, or how long they meant to stay. Many a sorrowful heart did they give comfort to. Many a poor stranger got alms at their gate, an' them that wanted no alms got a kind word an' a pleasant smile. It was never known ov a Dillon that he had a hard word or a sour look on his face for the poor. And now here is the ind of it all, an' there's the last of the Dillons lavin' out his own house, for ever an' ever. Oh, Queen of Consolation! isn't this a sorrowful sight! Oh, wirra sthrue! wirra sthrue! Sweet bad luck to all the lawyers an' bailiffs, an' long life to 'em to enjoy that bad luck. That they may walk in their own funeral, an' swing high on a windy day, dancing a hornpipe to the tune ov the Rogues' March, upon nothing at all! Ochone! ochone!"

The task of getting Mr. Dillon into the carriage was not an easy one, for he was suffering from an attack of gout, and was very feeble besides. Whether he heard the passionate exclamations that passed from lip to lip, or not, could not be ascertained by those immediately near him, for not a muscle of his face relaxed its expression of stolid apathy. At last he was seated in the carriage, and the priest got in

quickly after him, making a sign to Pat to close the door, and bid the coachman drive on at once. The order was obeyed as soon as it was given, and the carriage began to move. When the people saw it in motion, they broke through all restraint, and gave full vent to their sympathy and sorrow. An old woman in front clapped her hands wildly, and burst out into the opening notes of that most melancholy of all funeral dirges, the Irish "caoine," or lamentation for the dead. After the first bar it was taken up by the rest, and in a moment the wild, heart-piercing wail rose and fell, and rose again, ringing out on the clear air with mournful, melodious cadence.

When the first sound of the death-chant burst upon his ears, Mr. Dillon was roused from his appearance of apathetic indifference. He started as if he had suddenly got a blow, listened for a moment to sounds the meaning of which was well known to him, and, sinking back in the carriage with a low moan, he covered his face with his hands.

"This is all very wrong, very improper, indeed," cried the priest in an angry voice, although as he spoke, his own eyes were swimming with tears. "I gave particular directions to Pat Flanagan that there should not be anything of this kind, no demonstration whatever."

"After all, what difference can it make?" said the poor, broken gentleman. "It is the last demonstration that will ever be made for me, until the four black horses will bring me to where all the rest of the Dillons are sleeping soundly. Oh, Father John! would to God that I could lay down my head this day among them!"

"You shall do so when God pleases, my good friend, but I hope that day is still far distant," replied the priest cheerily. "In God's good time, you and all of us shall be called home to our true country, which this world is not, and was never intended to be; and while waiting for that time, we must take up our cross and carry it, or, at least, try to do it."

"I hope I'm submissive to God's holy will, for myself at least," said the poor old man, "but when I think of my poor children, I think my heart will break. They are beggars, man, *beggars*. My weak, delicate girl, how is she to face a hard world? Hyacinth, my bright, high-spirited boy, what is to become of him?"

"God will take care of your daughter; such as she, He regards with peculiar love and tenderness. Have no fears for her. Neither have any for Hyacinth; what fear is there for any young fellow, strong and healthy, and willing to carve out his own fortune

bravely and independently? We shall live, both of us, to be very proud yet of the lad."

There was no more conversation until they arrived at the priest's house, which was a little outside the small town, or rather village, of Castle Cloyne. It was only a cottage, vastly inferior of course to the grand old house they had left behind them, but still comfortable-looking and home-like. It contained only one sitting-room, but that was as neat and cheerful as it could be made. A bright fire was blazing in the grate, and on the centre table were glasses, and a decanter of wine. It was not long until, between the priest and the driver, Mr. Dillon found himself seated in a comfortable arm-chair by the fire, with his gouty foot resting on a soft cushion; and while the house-keeper bustled about, making preparations for serving up dinner, he owned to himself that he might have found a temporary asylum in worse places than the house of the parish priest.

In the course of the evening, Pat Flanagan arrived with his master's luggage, for Mr. Dillon was much too infirm to be able to dispense with the services of a personal attendant. Pat was now, for a wonder, very subdued and silent. With all his vanity, his native shrewdness taught him that the present was not the time in which he could indulge in high spirits, or much

talk, and accordingly he kept both, with a good deal of tact, under due restraint. He did not want for either good sense or good feeling, and without being as noisy as usual in his attendance on his failing master, was just as respectful and assiduous as he had been in the old time.

The very day that Mr. Dillon had arrived at the priest's house was that appointed for the sale of his property in Dublin, and his anxiety to get a letter from his son was excessive. He was alone for the greater part of the evening, for the priest had his own duties, which could neither be deferred nor set aside for any one, or on any pretence, and, therefore, was unavoidably obliged to be absent. Mr. Dillon, under the iron grasp of his enemy the gout, was compelled to remain quiescent, and felt keenly the unaccustomed solitude. Every ten minutes he rung the bell, which was within reach of his hand, for Pat to put more turf on the fire, to pull up the window-blind, to pull it down again; but in reality it was only to break the monotony of the long weary day, and hear the sound of his own voice, or that of some other person. And Pat, as if he had divined his old master's drift, was very slow in performing every little office required of him, and while lingering about, was in no way chary of his conversation. With what feverish anxiety did the poor

man count the hours until evening, at which time the letters and newspapers would be brought from the village.

No letters, however, came until the third day after Mr. Dillon had arrived at the priest's house, and while they were both sitting by the fire after dinner, the anxiously expected letter from Hyacinth was brought in. Mr. Dillon's hands shook so violently that he could not open it, but sat twisting and turning it about, unable to break the seal.

"Open it, Father John, for I cannot," he said at last in a husky voice. "You know that I have no secrets from you."

The priest opened the letter, and read it aloud. Hyacinth wrote only a few lines, but the anguish of his soul was manifested in every line. Owing to the dreadful state of the country, and the tightness of the money markets, the estate and house of Castle Cloyne were sold at an enormous sacrifice, not much more than seven years' purchase! Not only would there be no surplus to come to the owner, but the proceeds of the sale would hardly suffice to pay off all the debts!

Father O'Rafferty laid the letter on the table when he had read it, and then there was a profound silence.

"I expected it would have sold for more," said Mr. Dillon, after a pause, in a hard strained voice.

"So did I. But you see the times are fearfully bad; I never knew such awful times, and I hope I never shall again. There is no money in the country. The capitalists fly from it as from a pestilence, and so there is a pestilence in it, God help us! the pestilence of starvation. The people are dying all round us of actual hunger, and of diseases caused by hunger. The poor-houses are full to overflowing, and still the poor people are crowding to their gates. No man in this condition of affairs likes to invest his money in property that may not bring him back even one per cent. for many years to come. I confess I don't see how or when it is all to end; and my heart sinks down to the heels of my old boots when I think of all my dear old friends ruined, and my poor people perishing, while I am powerless to help any of them. I have only to work on while I have any work left in me, and leave the rest in the hands of God."

"It is not for myself that I am troubled at all," said Mr. Dillon. "My time here now cannot be very long, for I feel that this letter has given me my death-blow. Pray don't interrupt me, or tell me that I am maundering; though Heaven knows if

I were, it would be no earthly wonder. But I was never saner than I am at this moment, when the sands in my glass are so rapidly running down. And it is not altogether for Hyacinth that I am so troubled at heart; though if the poor boy were to shoot himself no one could be surprised. But he is young and healthy, and of a bright, elastic nature, and he will get on well in the army, and make friends wherever he goes. But it is of my poor girl I think most; for her my old heart is breaking. Robbed and plundered by a villain, as she has been, what is to become of her? My poor, lonely, delicate girl!"

"Let not your heart be troubled, or cast down on her account," replied the priest, grasping Mr. Dillon's hand. "From this day forth she is mine; my daughter, to eat of my crust, and drink of my cup, as long as it shall please God to leave us together. This house is a humble place for a Dillon of Castle Cloyne to call her home; but such as it is, she shall be as much respected and beloved in it, as if she were a princess. She shall be mistress there, and I and every other person in my house be her servants. So, my good friend, make your mind easy about Miss Grace; let not that thorn stick in your heart, or thrust itself between you and your Maker, whenever it may be His will to send for you."

"But I cannot let you burthen yourself with my child; you who have so little for yourself."

"But you can't help it, man. In a storm any port is welcome. This poor cottage, I know, is a very unsuitable lodging for one brought up as she was, and with the blood of a hundred fathers in her."

"Well, stop there, Father John," interrupted Mr. Dillon, with a sad bitterness, "there is an end now to that old story. It is past and done with for ever."

"Very well; I won't contradict you, though I might do it. Still, in spite of everything that's come and gone, she is Miss Grace Dillon, and the daughter of my good old friend, and the grand-daughter of the man to whom, under God, I owe all that makes life dear and precious to me. She needs comfort and kindness, and with God's help she shall have them as long as I am to the fore. My house lacks the style and luxury of her old home, but she will have peace there, if nothing else, and a peaceful life is the nearest approach to a happy one that I know of on this side of the grave."

"But the times are as hard on you as on anyone else," continued Mr. Dillon, "and if they don't mend, how are you to keep yourself, not to speak of another?"

"I often sat at your table, and I noticed that Miss

Grace had a wonderfully small appetite," said the priest, with an attempt at a joke. "The times are very bad, surely, and no one knows how bad they are, better than a parish priest who has not been paid a farthing of his dues for the last year and a half. But 'tis a long lane that has no turning, and my hope is strong that He who has laid this heavy burthen on us will send relief, if we have only patience and confidence in His mercy."

To this Mr. Dillon made no reply, and Father O'Rafferty noticed with much concern how weary and haggard he looked, and how sadly he was changed. It was as if years had gone over his head within the last few hours; aging the jovial face, and withering up the stout frame that had hitherto borne up so well against many storms.

"Don't you think it is time you were in bed?" said the priest, laying his hand on the bell. "This has been a trying day for you, and you are weary, and——"

"Broken-hearted!" cried Mr. Dillon, finishing the sentence.

Pat now made his appearance in answer to the bell, and took his master into a comfortable bedroom that was inside the parlour. It was the priest's own room, but he had given it up to his guest, and contented

himself with one, much inferior, at the other end of the house.

When Father John found himself once more alone, he began reading his office—a duty which the business of the day had prevented him from discharging until then. But though he tried to concentrate his attention on the page before him, his thoughts, in spite of himself, wandered away to the many scenes of misery that it was his lot to witness day after day. The life of a priest in Ireland at the time of the Famine was a very hard one, for where the suffering was greatest, and the pressure most severe, there it was his duty to be, by night as well as by day. In the fever-tainted hovel, kneeling on the damp earth beside the bed of rotten, mouldy straw; on committees for the relief of the poor, battling with all his energy for his miserable flock; in his church, preaching, catechising, and administering sacraments. His days were indeed full days in those melancholy times. And though his own personal privations were little thought of, because he never alluded to them, they were neither few nor light. His income was reduced so much that it hardly sufficed to keep himself and the poor, lean horse that bore him day after day over many a long, weary mile through his famine-stricken and desolate parish. Gradually, his purse grew more empty, and

his table more scanty, but he worked on cheerfully, untiringly, though his black coat was becoming a rusty brown, and the heart within him as heavy as a stone.

When his office was finished, the priest went to bed; but he could not sleep. The more he tried to compose himself to rest, the more restless and feverish he became. He heard the little Dutch clock that hung in the kitchen, strike the hours one after the other, while he turned from side to side, vainly trying to sleep. At last, when morning dawned, and he heard his housekeeper stirring in the kitchen hard by, he got up and dressed himself. Before offering up his morning's devotions, he thought he could not do better than go to the room of his unhappy guest, to see how he had passed the night. Even before he entered he was horrified by hearing a sound that he, whose daily duty it was to attend the dying, knew only too well. It was what is called the death-rattle! He burst into the room, opened the window-shutters to admit the dim light of the early morning, and then passing quickly to the bed, saw to his great horror that its occupant was unmistakably dying. Not only were his hours in this world numbered, but his very moments were numbered also.

"Do you know me, old friend; do you know me?"

he cried, pressing the cold, nerveless hand that lay outstretched on the counterpane.

"I do. Thank God, you are come in time," replied the dying man, in a low, faint voice.

The priest dashed out of the room, shouting to his housekeeper to bring a pair of lighted candles. Then putting on his stole as he went, or rather flew, to his own room, he came back almost immediately with the sacred elements necessary for administering the last sacraments. By the time that Mr. Dillon, in a few broken words, had made his last confession, the housekeeper and Pat Flanagan were kneeling at the foot of the bed, both weeping; though they tried to control themselves, so as not to disturb the last moments of the dying man.

It was a strange, as well as a most melancholy scene! The morning sunshine streaming in through the small window on the light of the candles, that looked yellow and dull in its cheerful radiance; on the bowed heads of the two servants, and the solemn, reverent countenance of the old white-haired priest, kneeling beside the bed, and reading, in a voice that struggled hard to be firm, the prayers for the dying, and on the outstretched form and pallid face of the dying man! dying of a broken heart, beggared, and broken down, and

homeless ; indebted to the kindness of his parish priest for the shelter of a roof, and for the bed on which he lay ; dying far away from both the children that he loved so well !

CHAPTER XII.

AN IRISH FUNERAL.

For a while they tread in silence dread—
Then muttering and moaning go the crowd,
Surging and swaying like mountain cloud,
And again the wail comes fearfully loud.

Ululu! ululu! kind was his heart!
Walk slower, walk slower, too soon we shall part.
Ululu! ululu! wail for the dead!
Ululu! ululu! here is his bed!

THOMAS DAVIS.

On the day after his father died, Hyacinth Dillon returned to Castle Cloyne. His arrival was a very great relief to Father O'Rafferty for many reasons, the chief being that the young man should arrive in time to lay his father's head in the grave. There was no electric telegraph in the country districts in Ireland in those days, and the post that came and went but once in the twenty-four hours was sent off at such an inconvenient time, that a letter could not be despatched until late in

the day, and Mr. Dillon's death had occurred very early in the morning. When Hyacinth's business in Dublin was transacted he made no further stay there, for he had no money to spend, and his heart was with those at home, who were looking out for him as their protector and comforter. From his very birth he had been over-indulged, unrestrained in every desire and caprice, and let play the man while yet only a mere boy; nevertheless, he was not spoiled, and as the good priest had often said, "the lad's heart was in the right place."

The funeral of the last Dillon of Castle Cloyne was as grand and imposing as if he had died the lord of all its broad acres, for so his son willed it. Father O'Rafferty had remonstrated wisely and kindly against this unnecessary expense, as well on the score of economy, as that he thought a quiet, simple funeral would, under existing circumstances, be in better taste. But Hyacinth did not look upon the subject in that light, and in this he was encouraged and supported by Terry Macnamara, who was now his nearest male relative. He said that his father should be laid to rest with as much respectful observance as was any Dillon that had gone before him. All that had come to him from them was gone, and he had died a beggared and broken-hearted man; but nothing

could deprive him of his good old blood, the long descent, and the stainless repute, that would bring friends and neighbours from far and near, to rally round his hearse. All his father's old friends, headed by Terry Macnamara, gathered about the young man, and backed him up in this resolution. The feeling of the county was with him also, for with the Irish a private funeral is held as ignominious, and showing that the defunct was a low, worthless person, neither respected while living, nor regretted when dead. So the priest, finding himself altogether in the minority, was obliged very reluctantly to withdraw his opposition.

The hearse was drawn by six tall black horses, but when the coffin was brought outside the house to be placed in it, a great number of the Castle Cloyne tenantry came forward, and declared that, as the graveyard was only three miles away, they would not suffer the remains of their late landlord to be taken there by horses, while they, his own people, with broad shoulders and willing hands, were there ready to carry his coffin. So the empty hearse, with its waving plumes and stately horses, went slowly on after the coffin, which was borne on the shoulders of eight stout young men, who were relieved in their labour of love by eight others at intervals as they went along. After the coffin went the two chief mourners, Hyacinth

and Terry Macnamara, and behind them Father O'Rafferty, and all the clergymen of the whole district, of every denomination, with white scarves and hat-bands, and walking two abreast. After the clergy came a number of women in long white cloaks, and hoods of the same colour drawn closely round their faces. These women were the professional *keeners*, the most celebrated that could be procured—famous for their skill in improvisation, and in lamenting the dead, in their own vigorous and expressive tongue. Then came an immense string of carriages and other vehicles, in which were all the gentry of the country for many miles round. The procession was closed by an enormous number of the peasantry on foot.

It was the greatest funeral that had been seen in that part of the country for many a long year, extending for more than two miles in a straight line. It passed over a mountain road that had been constructed in many turns and windings, to make it as level as was possible; and it was an impressive and picturesque sight to catch a glimpse of the long array as it moved slowly on, at one time hidden from view by an abrupt angle of the road, and in a few minutes emerging again—now breasting a rise in the ground, now descending into a lonely valley. And at intervals, as

they went along, "the Banne Keenthagh," as the professional mourners were called, raised the death-song, reciting the praises of the deceased, and the virtues and glories of the old family from which he was descended. At the end of each verse, sung by a single voice, the other women took up the strain, and swelled the chorus of lamentation. The effect of so many voices, though very wild and barbaric, was still by no means unpleasing. When it is heard in the house it is harsh and piercing, but in the open air, and at a little distance, it is striking and melodious. Once heard it is never forgotten! As the funeral procession wound round the mountain pass, the wild melancholy cadence rose and fell, and sometimes was lost altogether, until after a few moments, it swelled out again in sad harmony, as if in its passionate wail was concentrated the essence of all human sorrow!

When they arrived at the graveyard, Father O'Rafferty advanced to the head of the coffin, and began to read the service for the burial of the dead. The family vault had been opened early in the day to allow of the escape of all foul air, and as the last words of the service were read, and the last blessing pronounced, the remains of Dominic Dillon were laid in peace, and with all honour, among the ashes of his kindred. Then the immense crowd began slowly to

melt away, dispersing in different directions, but the two mourners and the priest remained standing beside the vault until it was finally closed by the workmen who were there for that purpose; and then they too moved away silently, and the last Dillon of Castle Cloyne was left to his rest.

There was a great and noticeable change in our old friend Terry Macnamara since we saw him last. The bad times had leant very heavily on poor Terry, as they had done on all his old friends and neighbours. He had never been rich; indeed, his means were very limited, though he had always made the appearance of a gentleman, and preserved a sturdy independence that rejected all obligation, save now and then a little hospitality; and before the time of the Famine *that* was not reckoned as any obligation in Ireland. Indeed, the obligation was considered to have been altogether at the other side. But that poor Terry was a sharer in the general distress, was seen at a glance. His clothes were still scrupulously neat, but getting rusty in colour, as well as threadbare from constant brushing, and his hat had lost all its old silken gloss; his boots had more than one patch on them, and his gloves were shabby and broken. He looked thin and careworn, and his hair, that was raven black when last we saw him, was now rapidly growing

gray. But his tall, spare figure was as erect and upright as ever, and his manner as genial and courteous. For under all circumstances, and through every reverse of fortune, Terry Macnamara was essentially and unmistakably a gentleman. Neither change of times, nor pressure of poverty, could ever make him lose caste, or forgetful of the suave old motto, "Noblesse oblige."

The two cousins returned to the priest's house to dinner, but went away in the evening, as there was no sleeping accommodation for them there. Terry had always kept his own quiet lodgings in the village of Castle Cloyne, and now Hyacinth shared his sitting-room, and got a bedroom in the same house. This arrangement was to be only for a few days, until he should be able to decide on his future plans.

In the meantime Miss Dillon was lying very ill at the priest's house. As soon as the tidings of her father's death had reached her, she came at once to have the sad consolation of weeping over his cold remains, and looking again on the face that, when she had seen it last, was animated with sense and life. But the sudden and violent shock, followed by the feverish excitement of the funeral, had been too much for the frail, sensitive girl, whose health, even at the best of times, had never been strong. She was

attacked by some kind of low fever, which, though not dangerous, was tedious and exhausting, and left her in the end in a state of great lassitude and prostration.

During all this time Hyacinth had not heard either of, or from, the Wilsons. Mr. Wilson had attended the funeral in his carriage, like all the other gentry of the district, but had left the graveyard immediately after the interment, without making any attempt to speak to Hyacinth, the son of the deceased, and one who was the affianced husband of his own daughter. So very marked and so unsympathetic a proceeding did not, as a matter of course, escape general observation, and many were the comments passed on it by the persons who were standing in various groups around. It was a strange thing for Mr. Wilson to act so by anyone; but the cause of this was not far to seek. Hyacinth Dillon was no longer the heir of Castle Cloyne! He was landless, homeless, and with nothing

Save men's opinions and his living blood,
To show the world he was a gentleman.

On the day when the hammer of the Encumbered Court fell on the broad acres of the old family, the last of the race had forfeited, in the opinion of the rich *parvenu*, all his pretensions to the hand of his daughter.

Some faint murmur of the idle gossip that was floating about on the subject came at last to the ears of Hyacinth, but he indignantly rejected it as a base calumny on the honour of Mr. Wilson, and the truth of his betrothed wife. His great love refused to admit a thought that would cast a doubt on the good faith of either. He was young and inexperienced, and was now to learn for the first time how exactly circumstances are supposed to change a man, and also what a depth of meanness and treachery an ignoble nature can descend to, when actuated solely by motives of worldliness. Owing to his absence in London, his father's troubles and failing health, a great deal of business had devolved on him when they returned, leaving him little leisure for the old pleasant rides to Beech Hill, in which he used to take so much delight. Caroline had written to him sometimes in reply to his passionate letters, but latterly she had not written often, and he was so worried and miserable about the wretched state of affairs at home, that he did not attach much importance to what, at another time, would make him anxious and unhappy. But now he could no longer shut his eyes to what had been for a long time obvious to everyone but himself, and he resolved to go at once to Beech Hill, and ascertain what it was he had to hope for, and what to fear.

On the first day that his sister was sufficiently recovered to sit up in her own room, Hyacinth mounted his horse to ride to Beech Hill. As the reader has been already informed, it was a considerable distance from Castle Cloyne, so that, as he rode along, he had ample time for reflections, which were anything but pleasant. His position was fearfully changed from what it had been in the old time, when he was the heir to a noble property, and the future head of an old family that had always held a foremost place among the aristocracy of the county. Now he was only Hyacinth Dillon, with not an acre that he could call his own, or a roof under which he could rest his head, unless he paid for it. He would have a commission in the army, and the small annuity left him by his godmother! And yet he had the folly, or rather insanity, to go to the Wilsons, and ask them to hold by their contract with him, and consent that a marriage, arranged under such very different circumstances, should still take place. As all these mortifying reflections passed through his mind, his heart almost failed him, and he thought more than once of turning his horse's head and going back again. But he took shame to himself for his faintheartedness, and confident of the affection of his betrothed, he hoped that her father would not let worldly calculation interfere

with her happiness. Then he would see her once more; that was a joy that he could not deny himself. From her own lips alone would he accept his sentence, and his heart—the sanguine, credulous heart of youth!—whispered to him in honeyed accents that it would not be an adverse one.

In due time he arrived at Mr. Wilson's gate, where he found that gentleman standing, while giving directions to some of his workmen. When he saw young Dillon riding towards him, he became greatly embarrassed, and shuffled uneasily from one foot to the other, and nodded as he would have done to any ordinary acquaintance who might be passing by. When Hyacinth came up, he dismounted and, leading his horse by the bridle, advanced to Mr. Wilson with outstretched hand and his usual frank, cordial manner. But he was almost petrified by the reception that awaited him. It was not alone cold and constrained, but something much worse, something that he could not put into words, but which he felt most keenly. Mr. Wilson extended two fingers to his visitor, and after a few of the usual commonplaces about the weather, he turned again to his workmen, and was soon so much absorbed by his conversation with them, that he apparently lost all recollection of his presence. There was no loud call for one of the grooms to take

the young gentleman's horse to the stables, no cheerful announcement that he was just in time for dinner, and that Caroline was wondering why he had been so long absent. All this had belonged to the old times, and like them, apparently, was to be considered at an end. Mr. Wilson's manner was so very decided, that it left no doubt whatever on the matter.

Hyacinth was not slow to understand what the vulgar *parvenu*—who not very long ago had considered that the visit of a Dillon to his house was a great honour—meant by such a hostile front. A dark flush overspread the young man's handsome face; but he compressed his lips, resolving to bear all patiently for the sake of her he loved. He waited quietly, bridle in hand, until Mr. Wilson could no longer have any excuse for detaining his workmen, who at last went off in different directions.

"I regret that I cannot ask you to stay and dine with us, Mr. Dillon"—it used to be "Hyacinth" up to this—said Mr. Wilson, in a voice and with a manner that he meant should be very grand and dignified, but which was only stiff and formal; "but my daughter and I are going out to dinner. It being an engagement of long standing, it would not be possible for us to send our apology at this late hour."

"I have come merely to make a morning visit, so shall not interfere with your engagement," replied Dillon quietly. "I wanted to see Caroline; we have not met now for some time."

"I fear you cannot see her, for before I left the house she had gone with her maid to her dressing-room."

"I can wait until she is dressed. After riding from Castle Cloyne, she will not refuse to give me a few minutes while the carriage is being brought round;" and as he spoke, he called to a little ragged boy who stood staring at them, and giving him the bridle to hold, opened the gate and walked up the avenue towards the house.

Mr. Wilson was swelling with indignation and mortified pride to see himself bearded at his own gate by a mere boy, but in his secret heart was rather pleased than otherwise at the turn matters had taken, by having, as it were, a quarrel put upon him.

"When I said that you could not see my daughter, I meant that you should not," he growled out in a most surly voice, "for I never say one thing and mean another. When I left the house she had rung for her maid, and was gone to dress for dinner. She is so much engaged in preparing for this party that she cannot possibly see you."

"I can wait until her toilet is completed."

"Well, Mr. Dillon, I will be frank with you, as it will save some trouble, and will be best for all parties in the long run. Your visits to Beech Hill must be discontinued. When I sanctioned your addresses to my daughter, and consented to your engagement with her, your position was quite different from what it is now. I should be very sorry indeed to say anything that would wound your feelings, but I have a duty to perform to my child which is superior to every other consideration. I must secure, at all costs, her future comfort and happiness, and this could not be accomplished if I were to give any further countenance to her marriage—either proximate or remote—with you. Since the time that I received your proposal for the hand of my daughter, your social position and your future prospects have undergone a fearful change, while hers remain just as they were. Don't you perceive it yourself now?"

"But I am still the same man, the same in family and good repute that I was then; the man your daughter loves, and to whom she has plighted her troth."

"No, sir, you are not. The man to whom my daughter plighted her troth was the heir of Castle Cloyne. Excuse me if I give you pain, but you have forced me to it. You are not the heir to anything

now, that I know of. You talk of your family, good repute, and so forth; this is all very well for yourself—some people are amused by such things—but they won't do to set up housekeeping on. And, believe me, young gentleman, you will do well to accept the inevitable, and take a common-sense view of the matter, instead of nursing this romantic folly, which can lead to nothing but disappointment. Money, sir, is the oil that keeps the wheels of life going smoothly round, and he who is without it has no business going to look for a rich wife!"

"I cannot take my dismissal from you, Mr. Wilson. I cannot, and I will not," said Dillon, disgusted by his vulgar purse-pride. "I *must* see Caroline herself, and know from her own lips if her feelings towards me are as changed as yours. I must see her without your consent, if it cannot be with it. If she tells me that she thinks and feels as you do, I shall, as a matter of course, resign all pretension to her hand; but if, on the contrary, she says that she still loves me, and holds fast to her engagement, no power on earth shall separate us."

Mr. Wilson's reply to this speech was a burst of derisive laughter.

"I don't want your money, sir!" cried the wretched young man, who by this time was nearly

frantic with excitement and wounded pride. "You may keep your money, but I want my promised wife, the girl I sought when all the advantage was certainly on my side. I am the same man still, and I will not take my sentence from anyone but herself."

"You cannot see her; I told you that before, and I mean to keep my word. Surely you will not force your way into my house in spite of me?"

"Well, no. But I shall manage to see her elsewhere, for you can't make a prisoner of her at her time of life."

"Will you be satisfied with a letter from her?—and I promise you fairly, that I shall in no way coerce her in what she may choose to write to you. She shall have full liberty to convey her real sentiments unbiassed by me in the least degree. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes. At least, I have no choice left me. I shall now relieve you of my presence; but before I go, I warn you, Mr. Wilson, not to tamper with the happiness of your daughter, or compel her to act against her affections and her conscience. I shall say nothing on my own behalf, for I'm not your child, and you owe me no duty; but you owe it to her. A grave responsibility rests on you where she is in question. Beware what use you make of it!"

"I have taken good care of her up to this, and I mean to do so for the future. The best proof of that is, that I will not consent to deliver her up to poverty and privation. She has perfect confidence in me, and we understand each other fully."

This last sentence he pronounced with a knowing wink, and a broad grin on his face; for which Hyacinth would most willingly have kicked him on the spot.

By this time they had arrived at the hall-door, and as Mr. Wilson did not invite him to enter, even to take some refreshment after his long ride, Hyacinth was obliged to take his leave, which, as may well be imagined from the character of their interview, was by no means a very cordial one. The unhappy young man retraced his steps to the gate in a state of mind not easily described. His pride—sorely wounded in later times, but never more so than now—had been humbled to the very dust, by a vulgar, purse-proud upstart, who had told him that *he*, Hyacinth Dillon, was not husband good enough for his daughter! He had been treated with the utmost rudeness and discourtesy, by the very man who, not very long ago, had flattered and fawned on him with the most abject servility. Now, indeed, for the first time did he come to realise the full force of his great downfall;

now. had the iron of poverty entered into his very soul.

But there was one thing to make him be of good heart, one ray of comfort that made amends for his hard trial, and that was that his father did not live to see this day. The old man had suffered enough before he was mercifully called away, without having this crowning sorrow and humiliation added on to all the rest. Once upon a time, Hyacinth Dillon would have fiercely given the lie to any man who had dared to tell him that the day would surely come in which he would rejoice at his father's death. That evil day had now come, and he was glad with all his heart that the old man was at rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

My native land, good-night.

BYRON.

BETWEEN the fatigue consequent on having ridden nearly thirty miles without any food, and the exhaustion caused by great mental suffering, Hyacinth slept soundly until a late hour on the following day. When he came down to the sitting-room, where breakfast was awaiting him, he found that his cousin, who was an early riser, had breakfasted long since, and gone out on particular business. While Hyacinth was going through the form of eating—for it was only a form—he heard the postman's knock at the hall door, and a letter was immediately after brought up to him, in the well-known handwriting of Miss Wilson. So far, her father had kept faith with him. He tore open the envelope with all the eager devotion of a lover, but only

to experience a most grievous disappointment. The letter was not at all what he had so fondly and foolishly imagined that it would be. With pale cheeks and compressed lips, he read it to the very end, slowly and resolutely, as if to give himself plenty of time to master its contents. They were as follows :

“ DEAREST HYACINTH,

“ My father has just told me of your visit to us on yesterday. I was very sorry to have missed seeing you ; still, on thinking it all over, I have come to the conclusion that, for the present, it is better that we should not meet. It would serve no purpose, except to excite and agitate both of us. My father has completely changed his mind on the subject of our engagement, and as he is very obstinate when once he has determined on anything, I fear we shall have great difficulty in bringing him back to his original way of thinking. He says, or rather swears, that if I do not give up my engagement with you, he will not give me as much as a shilling or ever see my face again. Under these circumstances, I don't quite see my way ; I only know that my courage, never very great, is quite unequal to braving his anger and incurring his lifelong displeasure. I could never consent to be a burden on you, or add to your many troubles by going

to you as a penniless bride. It would be madness in me, and to you utter ruin. Forget me, dear Hyacinth, or think of me only as a sister who loves you very much, and shall always feel the greatest interest in everything in which you and yours are concerned.

“Yours affectionately,

“CAROLINE WILSON.

“P.S.—This letter requires no answer.”

He crushed this heartless production between his hands until it was a mere rag, and then ground it to atoms beneath his heel. All the rage and mortification, that with so much difficulty he had restrained under the outrageous provocation that he had got from Mr. Wilson on the previous day, was now vented on that sheet of senseless paper. The total want of all womanly love and sympathy, the cool calculation, the undisguised worldliness, so openly manifested in every line of this precious epistle, almost maddened him. Caroline was her father's true daughter; she had shown herself to be an apt pupil, and learned his lessons of selfish craft with ready docility. And this was the woman to whom he had given his whole soul; at whose feet he had freely poured out all the wealth of his joyous, happy youth, and all the warmth and tenderness of a young man's first affection!

He sat there, he knew not how long, until Terry Macnamara came back, who, with a look of amazement at the disorderly breakfast-table, reminded him that they were to dine that day with Father O'Rafferty, and that it was now late enough for them to be setting out. With a weary sigh the young man went back to his room to make some alterations in his dress, and, after a short time, told his cousin that he was ready to accompany him to the priest's house.

As usual, the female element was absent from the table at Father O'Rafferty's; for Miss Dillon was still too great an invalid to take her place there. It was a silent and cheerless meal, and though the genial host did all he could to raise the spirits of his guests, the task just then was more than he could accomplish. Terry was unusually thoughtful, and took very little part in the conversation; and Hyacinth, sad and moody, took no part in it at all. However, when the cloth had been removed, and the three gentlemen left to themselves, with the materials for punch on the table before them, the social horizon began to clear a little.

"I have been thinking, and I am sure, Father John, that you will agree with me, that this poor lad is only wasting his time by remaining here," said Terry. "What earthly business has he in Castle

Cloyne now that his father and his father's property are both gone ! He is no longer a boy, but a man ; and he should now take a man's place in the world, and fight a man's battle in it as best he can. I am sure he will do it manfully and independently, and like a gentleman who stands bound to keep his father's name as unspotted and stainless as he received it. I will go with him to London, where his father is yet remembered, and where I myself have a few old friends still left, who have sufficient influence with the ministry to employ it in getting him a commission. I am too proud to ask them for anything for myself, and too old now to begin the world once more ; but to apply to them for Hyacinth would be altogether a different thing. A commission in the army, or a civil appointment under Government, either at home or abroad, would not be a bad thing as matters stand with us. The ministry can't ignore the fact that poor Dominic was their firm supporter, and in common decency, to say nothing of gratitude, they must give us one of the army berths that are continually at their disposal."

"I quite agree with you in every word you say," replied the priest ; "and it was to talk the matter over that I asked you both to share my dinner this evening. Hyacinth has now to make his own way in

the world ; that is a fact that we must look steadily in the face. The sooner that he begins, the better for him. He is young ; and God never intended youth to sink down in useless inactivity or selfish repinings. Hyacinth has a little back in his own fifty pounds a year, and though it is a poor back for *him*, still it is something to lean on, and will help to keep the wolf from the door until the pay-day comes round."

"I shall never touch a shilling of that annuity for my own use," said Hyacinth. "While my sister lives that money is hers, and not mine. God knows it is a poor provision for her, but it is all I have to give. I am healthy and strong, and I can manage somehow ; but I never could respect myself, or hold up my head among men, if I took a farthing of that fifty pounds and left her destitute, weak and ailing as she is."

"Destitute Miss Grace shall never be as long as I am to the fore," cried the priest with animation. "The very night before her father's death, I made him a solemn promise that while I lived, his daughter should eat of my bread, and drink of my cup, and be to me as a dear child. That promise was not lightly made, and it shall be sacredly kept, with God's help. So, lad, make your mind easy about your sister ; for as long as I am spared, she shall not want a home."

Hyacinth extended one hand across the table, and

with the other covered his face to hide the tears that were rising from a sorely bruised but grateful heart.

"You are the very best of good fellows, Father John!" cried Terry Macnamara; "and nothing that you say or do can surprise me, for I know your kind heart. It is time now for me to do so at the end of more than forty years. Grace, by right, should have a home with me, for after Hyacinth I am the nearest relation she has in the world; but these bad times have dealt so cruelly by me that I can hardly say I have a home to bring her to. I would not make this confession to everyone, but to you both I will own that I am desperately hard up. My poor tenants—they were never very many—are all dead or gone into the poor-house, and my little property is gone to the dogs. I cannot even pay the head-rent, though it isn't much; and every day I expect to be served with an ejectment by the head landlord, who is, Heaven knows, as badly off himself as it is possible for a man to be."

"I did not know, Terry, that things were so bad as that with you," said the priest, in a tone of deep feeling. "May God pity us! Where is it all to end?"

"Nor should you know it now," said Terry sturdily, "for I am not in the habit of annoying my

friends by inflicting my troubles on them, as each and all have their own nowadays, but that I wished to explain to you how powerless I am to do anything for poor Dominic's girl. Those two children have grown up at my knee, and their father and I were more like brothers than cousins."

"Say no more about it, if you love me," broke in Hyacinth; "we shall do well enough, Grace and I. You would help us if you could, Terry, as freely as we would help you, but none of us can do anything. I accept Father John's kind offer of a home for Grace, until I can afford to provide one for her, and his kind fatherly protection, for she is too young and too delicate to live alone. But the fifty pounds yearly she must have. I could not bear to think that she was without a few pounds of her own. It would be very hard on her father's child to be obliged to ask anyone—even you, Father John—for the price of her clothing, or for a little to give to her old pensioners and poor old neighbours that might come to see her. It is a miserable thing to have a generous heart accompanied by an empty purse. I will add another reason, and the best of all, why she should have this poor annuity. While you live, father, she has a shelter at all events, but if you died—and you are mortal, as we all are—what would become of my poor Grace then?

She would suffer privation, no doubt, but she need not face the poor-house while she has that money."

"The lad is right, by Jove!" exclaimed Terry, bringing his clenched hand down heavily on the table. "I always said he had brains in his head, and now he is beginning to make use of them. Don't you see yourself the truth of what he says, and the real, practical wisdom that's in it?"

"I do. He has got an older head on his young shoulders than we old graybeards gave him credit for; and, better even than that, his heart is in the right place."

"I always told you that it was. But, Hyacinth, my boy, I fear you would hardly be able to live in the army on your pay alone; why, it would be half starvation. And then the outfit; we have to think of that."

"Don't worry yourself about that at all. I shall not enter the army, or go to London to look out for an appointment, and be kicking my heels at the door of one great man after another, with my hat in my hand, making interest to get some beggarly situation, which, even if I got it, would hardly suffice to keep soul and body together. I shall do better than that, if I am not greatly mistaken. I shall go to California, where stout hearts and strong hands are digging gold out of the bowels of the earth."

"But, oh! my boy, you could never live the sort of life that the people out there are said to lead," cried Terry, in great dismay. "You were never used to such dreadful hardship, and you would soon sink under it."

"Nothing of the sort. It is a thousand times better than starving in the army on three-and-sixpence a day, and being expected to keep up the appearance of a gentleman on the pay of a groom! I hear that there are many young fellows out at the gold-fields, quite as good in all respects as I am; and why cannot I work hard, and fare as coarsely as they? Fortunes are made there by a few weeks or a month's toil and privation, and why should not I try my luck as well as another? I am sure my need is as great as it can well be. The gold is to be had for the trouble of digging it, and you know fortune favours the bold."

"But you have no money to take you out to that auriferous land; and, alas! I have none to give you," said Terry with a sigh.

"But you forget my mare Cora. She was exclusively my own property, and could not be sold to pay my father's creditors. Cora is worth one hundred pounds, if she is worth a penny. I shall get at least sixty for her; and that sum will be amply sufficient

to pay my passage out, and provide me with the small outfit requisite for a person going to the gold-fields. It is rather less costly than that necessary for the army," he added with a laugh.

"There is no use in opposing him," observed the priest, turning to Terry; "for I can see plainly that his mind is made up on the matter. After all, it may be by long odds the best thing that he can do with himself. If he does not succeed at the diggings—and I can't see why he should not as well as anyone else—or if he finds the work or the climate too much for him, he can turn his face homewards once more. It would be the easiest thing in life. And if it comes to that with him—which I am in no way afraid of—he will still be young enough to try something else, and make a fresh start in another line. Certainly he will be none the worse for having travelled a little, and seen something of the world. It does a young fellow good to go abroad sometimes, and rub the country cobwebs out of his eyes, and the country rust off his manners. To go off to California, and be thrown on himself for a while, might very possibly be the best turn the lad could give himself."

"So be it, in the name of God," said Terry Macnamara. "I have no fear that he will ever do any discredit to his country, or his father's name,

wherever he is. There is good stuff in the boy, Father John, and we may safely let him go."

"And the sooner he goes the better," added Father John. "There is nothing to be made by his staying on here, but, on the contrary, much valuable time lost."

It was touching, and at the same time amusing, to see the mingled pride and affection with which those two old, world-worn men looked on the stalwart, handsome young fellow, who, notwithstanding his six feet and broad shoulders, they still fondly called "the boy" and "the lad." To them his birth was an occurrence of yesterday; they had watched him emerging from childhood to manhood, by what to them were imperceptible degrees, and each of them, in his own way, had done his best to spoil him. It might have been said that he had three fathers, for his real father hardly loved him more than did the old bachelor cousin, who was his godfather, had given him his first "tip," and taught him to shoot, and ride, and box in the most approved and scientific fashion practised at the English public schools; for Terry was one of those old-fashioned people who think that a youth should know how to take his own part, when occasion required it, by the dexterous use of his fists, the natural and ready weapons with which nature has furnished man.

The old priest had married his father and mother, had baptised himself, and hoped to live to marry him also when the proper time came in which that solemn ceremony was to be performed. And Hyacinth was not ungrateful to them, but repaid their kindness and affection with the same respectful consideration that he would have shown to his own father, had he still lived. His heart was set on leaving the country which contained Mr. Wilson and his daughter, and going to some place wherein he would neither see them, nor hear their names spoken of; but he felt that he could not have persevered in that resolution had those two old and true friends opposed him in it. That he had now won their approbation and consent to his plan was an immense relief to his mind, as well as an omen of success in its fulfilment.

And so it was settled, and his life, at least for some time to come, was mapped out for him with every care and foresight that affection and experience could devise. His few preparations were soon made, for a Californian gold-digger did not require a large or an expensive outfit, and now all that remained was the last and saddest task of all, the great wrench of parting with all he loved.

Hyacinth spent the greater part of his last day in Castle Cloyne, sitting in his sister's room, but she had

no idea that it *was* the last. They all thought that if she knew he would not return again before he finally sailed for America, it would have an injurious effect on her in her present weak state, so she was not told it. They wished to spare her the anguish and excitement of the last parting. She believed that he was going away for a few days on some necessary business ; and so, looking forward to seeing him once more before he sailed, she was tolerably cheerful. But he, knowing that he was leaving her for a long time, probably forever—for she was delicate and frail, and he was facing a life of much hardship and danger—was very sad and dispirited. But he tried hard to hide this sadness from her. Once or twice, however, it grew so overpowering that he was obliged to invent some excuse for leaving the room. When he returned he was quite calm again, and talked to her very cheerfully of his hopes and plans of what he would do in the New World.

Just before they parted, she asked him what was the feeling of Caroline on the subject of his voyage, and whether she approved of it, or the reverse. She had noticed, with much surprise, that though he talked to her of many things and persons, he had never once alluded to Miss Wilson.

"Don't ask me any questions about *her*," he

replied, pressing her thin white hand. "All is at an end between us; Caroline is nothing to me, and I can never be anything to her."

"Why, dear? Have you and she quarrelled?"

"No, Grace, we have had no quarrel; but that old story is all over and done with. The man that Caroline loved was the heir of Castle Cloyne, and I am only poor Hyacinth Dillon. Is not that a sufficient answer to your question? If you were to question me for ever I could give you no other answer, for I know of none. Let us drop the subject now and for ever, and not, even to each other, ever breathe her name again. Little one, you must love me now more than ever, for in this world no other woman cares whether I live or die, and my mother's child is all I have to lean upon and trust."

"My dearest brother! my poor Hyacinth!" she said softly; while, bending towards him, she laid her head lovingly on his breast. There was no need for any more words between them. Those two desolate, lonely orphans understood each other, and sympathised with each other, as no other human being could do. But in a few moments he spoke again in his usual quiet voice, and then she knew that the subject was put aside for ever, and that page of his history was finally closed.

Before leaving her, he said that as he was going away early in the morning he would not disturb her at that hour, but would say good-bye now. He pressed her to his heart with a passionate clasp, and kissed her lips and brow and eyes with a yearning tenderness born of a presentiment that he was doing so for the last time. His emotion was so great that he might have altogether broken down only that Terry Macnamara, apprehensive of such a result, appeared at the door, telling him that his presence was required in the parlour on particular business, and in the end had almost to force him out of the room. When Hyacinth went into the parlour he leant his head on the table, and gave way to all the sorrow that he had repressed during the day with so much difficulty. Tears gushed from his sore heart like rain, and he fairly sobbed like a child.

"Don't mind me, boy; cry away," said Terry, whose own eyes swam in moisture. "It will help to ease your heart of the hard strain that lay on it all day, I know very well. You need never be ashamed of such tears; they are the last that you will ever shed, unless I am greatly mistaken; and that same is a comfort to think of. To-night you are only a boy, a poor, heart-stricken boy; but when you leave this to-morrow you will leave boyhood behind you, to take

up a man's life, and do a man's work in the world. You will think and act and work, but you never will cry again; at least, you will not if you have the mettle and the stout heart that your father's son ought to have in him."

The kind old gentleman did not limit himself to speaking words of affection and encouragement to his sorrowful young relative, but he arranged everything for him, taking pleasure in going over every little detail, and leaving nothing undone that he thought would make the voyage pleasant and comfortable. Nothing was left to chance, and nothing was forgotten. When all was done he went with Hyacinth to Liverpool—though where he got the money that paid his expenses to that port, and back again, was a mystery that was never cleared up—went on board the packet that was to take him to New York, and never left him until the order was peremptorily given by the skipper for "all strangers to go ashore." Then the two men—the old and the young—held each other's hand in a long yearning grasp, that was more eloquent than any spoken words could ever be. However, Terry kept a manful face, and tried to talk as if the parting were but temporary, and that they were soon to meet again, for he had determined that the boy should have as little as possible to cast him down on leaving the land,

and that his last recollections of it should be blended with pleasant looks, and words of hopeful cheer.

As long as the vessel was in sight, the poor old man stood on the pier with his white head bared, and waving his hat with might and main. But when it was so far away that the figure of Hyacinth, standing at the side, was but a mere speck that soon faded away altogether, the cheerful look died out of his face, and his step lost its firmness and ease. He went back to his lonely lodgings in a shabby third-rate hotel, with the weary, jaded look of one for whom the world held no further interest.

"Father and son are both gone now," he muttered to himself, as he crept along slowly and sadly. "Ay, father and son, both! All who ever cared for me are gone, and I stand alone in my old age—alone and poor! God help me! The best thing that could happen now is to die before I come to the workhouse, and be laid in peace with all the rest of the Macnamaras in the old ruins of Quin Abbey. It must come to that some day, and I don't care now how soon that day may be."

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS DILLON'S NEW HOME.

He was a simple, country parish priest,
And his good conscience was his only feast.
No worldly wealth had he, no pomp or state;
But though his means were small, his heart was great.

A FEW days after her brother had left Castle Cloyne, Grace Dillon found herself well enough to leave the room in which she had lain so long ill, and go to the parlour, where Father O'Rafferty was waiting to receive her. It was not a long journey certainly, but it tried her powers of locomotion somewhat, and then she recognised with a sigh how much her health, at best never very good or robust, had suffered from the trying events of the last few months. The priest laid aside the newspaper he had been reading on her entrance, and, taking her hand, led her to a sofa placed in a sunny corner near the window, that looked

out on a garden rich with vegetables of the most useful kind, and gay with a few hardy, old-fashioned flowers. He next poured out a glass of wine from a decanter lying ready on the table, and with a manner half authoritative and half playful, made her drink it. Then in order to give her time to recover herself a little, he took up the paper again, and resumed his reading where he had left off.

Grace had been often before in the priest's parlour, but there was a great and noticeable change in it to-day, from what it was when she had been in it last. She looked around her in much surprise, as little by little her eyes took in all the little details of this change. It was the same room, no doubt, but all the old furniture had been taken away, and that which had replaced it, was what had been in her own little sitting-room at Castle Cloyne. The sofa she sat upon was her own, and beside it was her work-table, with her work-box, and desk, laid on it ready for use. There were two recesses in the wall, one at each side of the fireplace; in one was placed her book-case, and in the other her piano, with the stool and music-stand beside it. And, as if the good old man had forgotten nothing that could give her pleasure, and make her look upon his house as her home, the portraits of her father and mother, that hung in the dining-room at

Castle Cloyne, now once more looked down on her with the old familiar smile.

She saw how it was at once. The priest had bought all those things at the auction, got them brought to his own house, and arranged in the parlour, while she was confined to her room at the other end of the house. Father O'Rafferty had sprung from the peasantry—his very name was sufficient to tell that—and was the son of parents who had lived and died in a poor cabin. He had not much learning beyond what had sufficed to qualify him for his sacred calling, and just as little polish of manners, for his lot had been cast with the ignorant and poor, his only parishioners of respectability having been Mr. Dillon and Terry Macnamara. But under a commonplace person and rough exterior, he had a heart as soft and tender as a woman's, overflowing with the milk of human kindness, and with a sort of quaint, shy delicacy that was peculiarly his own. He had built up a second home for this orphan girl where she had only hoped to find a shelter ; not, indeed, like the home she had left, for that was beyond his power, but still, one where she could live a peaceful, quiet life, and try to be content, though she could not hope to be happy. This, indeed, was kindness that she had not expected ; it surprised, it overpowered her, and

overcome by emotion, and weak from recent illness, she burst into a fit of low, passionate weeping.

"Now, my dear Miss Grace, remember that the doctor said you should keep very quiet," said the priest kindly. "This excitement is very injurious to you in your present weak state of health, and will serve no purpose but to retard your recovery."

"Oh, father, what can I say?" she cried between the sobs that almost suffocated her.

"Say nothing, dear child; but lie back on the sofa, and rest until you are more composed."

"But I must speak, if only to thank you for all your goodness to me and mine."

"Tut, tut; I don't want any thanks. That you are pleased with the little I have been able to do for you, and will try to be satisfied and happy in this poor place, is all the thanks that I look for."

"When God took my father from me, He did not leave me quite desolate. You are determined that I shall miss him as little as possible."

"My dear, I am a very poor substitute for your good and worthy father. And pray let me not hear you say anything more about obligation or gratitude. The obligation and gratitude are all on my side."

"Oh, no, no!"

"But I say yes; begging your pardon for con-

tradicting you so flatly. Look here, Miss Grace ; that I am a Christian priest, living in a decent house, and having a decent coat on my back, instead of being a day labourer, working with the spade in my hands, I owe to your family ; and that is no light obligation, you must own."

She looked at him in great surprise.

"It is perfectly true, my dear young lady. My father was one of the very poorest tenants on the Castle Cloyne estate, so very poor, indeed, that even though the rent of his little patch was low, he could only pay it and keep body and soul together by the hardest toil—toil so severe and unremitting, that it aged him, and brought him to his grave while still in the prime of life. All the property that he died possessed of, was two goats and an ass. As for the few sticks of furniture in his cabin, they were fit for nothing but to make firing of them. There was a year's rent due of him when he died, worn out by hardship and privation ; but your grandfather—God rest his soul!—who was then the owner of the estate, never thought of that at all. He had the goats and the ass and the few sticks sold for what they would bring, to pay the funeral expenses ; for, said he, 'poor Jack O'Rafferty was a decent, honest man, and he must be buried with his own money, and not at

any man's cost. In his lifetime it would grieve him sorely to think that he should be brought to his last home, among his own people, by charity money, and it must not be. He shall not be buried like a pauper, nor in a pauper coffin, but one paid for by his own money.' That, Miss Grace, was what your good grandfather said. He never thought of the rent that was due to him, he only thought of the respect that was due to the old tenant who was decent and honest, and who had died on his land. The few things brought just as much as paid for a decent funeral, and nothing more. I was at that time a little child of seven years old, and all the neighbours said there was nothing before me but to take to the road and beg, until such time as I would be old and strong enough to work for my living. But your good grandfather—may God give his soul eternal rest!—would not listen to anything of that kind. He said that I was a delicate child, weakly and underfed, and that the hardship of that kind of life would soon make an end of me, as no doubt it would. So he agreed with the man who took my father's little spot of land to keep me for a while with his own boys; which he was very glad to do, as he was allowed for it in the rent. Mr. Dillon also provided me with clothes, and insisted that I should go to school regularly, for he said that though I was

not very strong, I was pretty bright at my book ; at least the schoolmaster told him I was, and the good man believed it. After a few years, he was so pleased with the progress I had made—and prompted, too, by his own benevolent heart—that he sent me as a boarder to a good classical school, and when I was old enough to go to Maynooth, he gave me a respectable outfit. Every summer, when I came back for the vacation, he received me into his own house, for he said it wasn't fit that the 'timbers of a priest' should go any more to Luke Riley's cabin, or associate with his sons, who were of course, poor boys, as ignorant and wild as a pack of young colts. When I stayed at Castle Cloyne, he and his son—your own worthy father, Miss Grace—treated me, both in private and when there was company, as if I was a gentleman born, instead of being the creature of their bounty. When I left Maynooth finally, after being ordained, your grandfather made interest with the Bishop to have me appointed to his own parish of Castle Cloyne, first as curate, and later on as parish priest ; there were few things the Bishop would refuse the Dillons ! He gave me the price of a horse, and also something to start me with, when I got the parish, and keep the wolf from the door, until the dues came in. I took the horse as 'handsel' for good luck, but the money I paid back as soon as I could

afford to do so; but never, if I were to live for a thousand years, could I repay his charity, his untiring, patient kindness, for many long years. I can only pray for him, and for the man that was his true and worthy son, and that I do with all my heart and soul every day of my life. That is all I can do now for them, who did so very much for me!"

He stopped, completely mastered by his emotion, as well as by the rush of old memories that came crowding back upon him. The eyes of his young auditor again filled up, but she respected his great emotion so much that she did not break the silence.

"So, my dear, we shall say no more about obligation or gratitude," said Father O'Rafferty, when he had recovered himself somewhat, "for, as I have shown you, they are all on my side, and not on yours. I owe everything under God, except life, alone to your family, and, only for their charity, would be nothing but a poor slave, spending my days in toil and want. I married your parents, I baptised their children, and from the hour of your birth I have loved you and your brother very dearly. The only bright spot in all this dreary round of trouble and sorrow is, that I am enabled by a good Providence to offer you protection, and shelter, such as it is. If this poor cottage were a palace, you would be just as

welcome to it. So, for heaven's sake! my dear Miss Grace, don't worry either yourself or me any more by talking of obligation. Your father's child honours me highly by making my poor house your home, and being satisfied with it."

"But, father, you paid for those things out of your own pocket. The auctioneer surely did not let you have them for nothing."

"Pooh, pooh, a mere trifle, I assure you. I am sorry to say that everything went for nothing, or next to nothing. The whole country is so steeped in poverty, that no one, gentle or simple, has any money now for going to auctions. And when the few persons who were there heard me bidding for the furniture of your own parlour and bedroom, they all guessed that I wanted it for yourself, so not one had the heart to bid against me, and I got them very cheap indeed, those little odds and ends that were your own, and are your own still; so make your mind easy on that point. The price of the things is nothing to signify; they just went for a song, as the saying is."

"But I see that all your own furniture has been put out, to make room for what you call mine."

"So much the better, for they are no loss, or rather that loss is a gain. The parlour has now a respectable, comfortable appearance that it never had before. I

declare I am quite proud of it," and he looked round with a look of supreme satisfaction on his face..

"How can I ever repay you?" she murmured, with a quivering lip and broken voice.

"By making yourself happy and comfortable in this poor place. I know very well that I am but poor company for you, after your good father and brother, but I will do my best, and no one can do more. And your cousin, Terry Macnamara, and all your old friends and acquaintances, will come to see you, and cheer you up a bit. Oh! never fear; we shall get on splendidly after a little; I mean, when you get used to the place, and try to forget the big house of Castle Cloyne, and all the comfort and style that was in it. And when I come home in the evenings, after a hard day's duty in the chapel, or in attending sick calls, it will be a great recreation to me to listen to a tune on the piano, while I am taking my glass of punch after dinner. I don't care much for your grand German and Italian music, and to tell you the truth, my dear, I don't understand it in the least, and you can amuse yourself with it when I am away all day. But what I understand, and dearly love, is our own grand old Irish music, to my fancy the most beautiful in the world. The Scotch music, too, is very good, and so it ought to be, for

the two are nearly related. I often think that if there were as much pains and trouble taken to improve our own music, as there is with the foreign music, it would beat all the rest of the world. There are some of the old Irish and Scotch airs that fairly stir up my blood, old as it is, making me feel as if I was once more a boy, and there are more of them so sweet and pathetic, that they breathe out the very soul of music. I shall be as happy as a king in the long winter evenings, listening to you playing the 'Coolin',' or the 'Blackbird,' or 'Oh! save me from death.' That is the music for my taste."

"Many good judges would think you a great Goth for having such a taste," said she, with a smile, for she saw that all this talk was intended to rouse her up, and amuse her.

"Well, so they can. As I am not in high society, nor among great musical critics, I can have my own ideas on the matter, without fear of being laughed at, or sneered out of them. But I declare here is Biddy coming in to lay the cloth for dinner, and in good time too, for I am as hungry as a wolf, and in no way disposed to find fault with whatever she brings us. Biddy," addressing the housekeeper, "I hope you have something very nice for Miss Dillon; you know what a great invalid she has been for some time."

"Iss, your reverence. There is some beef-tay an' a wildfowl for Miss Dillon, an' a bit ov frosted bacon, an' a white heart of new cabbage with it, for yourself, father."

"Capital, Biddy; nothing could be better. A dish of frosted bacon with new white cabbage is a dish fit for a king, especially if his majesty was as hungry as I am this blessed minute. And, Biddy, take care that the wildfowl is neither burned to a cinder, nor red-raw, for Miss Dillon might take a dislike to it if it wasn't nicely cooked, and have her dinner spoiled. I'll inspect it myself, and carve it for her when it is on the table, so you had better look sharp. When she gets stronger she will see to all these matters for herself, and, with her usual goodness, spare me all trouble about the commissariat department of the house. One mistress in a house is worth twenty masters, for the best among them is only a botch."

And in this simple, homely way did the good old man try to cheer the lonely orphan girl, and make her feel that she was not a stranger in his house. He was not a very refined or polished gentleman, this poor country priest, for he never had the advantage of the early training that makes a gentleman out of a rough block, and in after life his associates and

companions, with the exceptions of the Dillons, and Terry Macnamara, were all among a class that by no polite fiction or stretch of the imagination could be called ladies or gentlemen. But he had the highest of all refinement, that of the mind, and a heart full of that rarest of all things, the milk of human kindness. He had not much that was in common with the rich, or the great ones of the world, and rarely came into contact with them, but he was quite at home with the poor, the sorrowful, and the suffering, for he was born one of that class, and his own early struggles and experiences had taught him to feel for them, and to sympathise with them. In the exercise of his sacred ministry, and particularly in those late times, this sympathy with distress, this feeling of compassionate protection, were so constantly called into action, that they became a part of his nature, and the ruling principle of his life. And now that he had got another poor, weak creature to protect, another desolate person to shelter under the large mantle of his compassion, he was completely in his element. Besides all this, he had the consciousness that he was, in a small way, returning to Grace some of the kindness that had been shown him by her family for three generations, and that the bread that they had cast upon the waters was, through his means, coming back

to her, the poorest and most helpless of them all, after many days.

There was a true and native chivalry in his treatment of her, in his manner towards her, and in the way that he addressed her, that was surprising in one peasant-born as he was. Never when she was at the head of her father's table, and dispensing his hospitality, surrounded by all the style and comfort that were part and parcel of such an establishment, was his manner more deferential than it was now when, stripped of everything, she was glad to find an asylum under his humble roof. He never once addressed her but as "Miss Grace," what he had always called her in the old time, and if he now and then said "my dear" or "my child" to her, it was done so partly in his quality of her spiritual father and partly to put her completely at her ease in his house, which he imagined she might not be if his manner and language were more formal, and less friendly and affectionate. But whatever he did, or whatever he said, he never once forgot that she was Miss Dillon of Castle Cloyne.

Grateful for his exceeding kindness, and anxious to gratify him, Grace, whose chief endowment lay in the possession of "a meek and quiet spirit," did her best to put aside the remembrance of her old home,

and accommodate herself cheerfully and willingly to her altered fortunes and new surroundings. Though she could not altogether "forget her kindred, and her father's house," nor prevent her heart from going over the waste of waters to that far distant land, where the last man of her name and blood was toiling all day long in the midst of the roughest companions and most uncongenial surroundings, yet she did her best to keep up her spirits, take care of her health, and wait with patience for the good time when her brother would return to her, and they would both be happy together once more. But though she looked forward anxiously to this great blessing, it was with a very faint and tremulous hope, that she hardly dared whisper to herself. It was with a longing, rather than a hope; the faint, wild dream of a happiness that *might* come to her in some far distant time, so very far away, indeed, that it sometimes melted into a shadowy mist, and in its place, when it had cleared away, was nothing but the gray, old, ivy-covered vault, where the Dillons, one after another, were sleeping their last sleep!

CHAPTER XV.

OONAGH FINDS ANOTHER PLACE.

That man is happy in his share,
Who is warm clad and cleanly fed;
Whose necessaries bound his care,
And honest labour makes his bed.

CHARLES COTTON.

WHEN we last saw Oonagh MacDermott, she had just left her comfortable quarters at Bawnmore, and, closely followed by the faithful Bran, was facing the world once more, with a very sorrowful and heavy heart. Wholly absorbed by her own bitter thoughts, and heedless of the rain that came down in a slow, persistent drizzle, she walked on mechanically, careless where she went, provided only that she increased the distance between herself and the false lover—and perjured as well as false—who had so heartlessly deserted her when he had become rich, and she poor. But though she was flying to some place where she

would neither see nor hear of him, she still could not bring herself to blame him for having treated her so ill. It was, she said to herself, "appointed" that he was to be married to Susie Burke, as surely as it was that Judy was to be married to "mad Dick Considine," and she herself was not to be married at all; for the two men who had brought the coffin with her name on the lid—and it was her *maiden* name—counted for nothing. There was another man in her dream—the fair-haired young priest celebrating mass; but she could not, of course, be married to him, and what *he* could have to say, or do, with regard to her future life, she could not imagine. All she knew was that he was in her dream. Why should she, even in her most secret thoughts, blame John Molloy? It had been written down in the book of irrevocable fate that he was not to be her husband, but Susie's, and in deserting her and marrying Susie, he was only fulfilling the fate that had been marked out for him even before his birth, and from which he could not possibly escape.

This fond superstition, so deeply rooted in the vivid poetical imagination of the Irish peasant, did much to reconcile her to her great trouble, though it did not and could not make her forgetful of it. She felt that, now when she would be far away from him,

her mind would be more at peace and her feelings more easily kept under control than they could possibly be had she remained at Bawnmore, to be a witness of the marriage, and a guest at the wedding-feast. She set herself, with her usual good sense and sturdy self-reliance, to take some thought for her own future, and let the dead past bury its dead. She should earn her own living, and the sooner she set about it the better. As if in unison with such wholesome thoughts, the rain gradually ceased, and after a little time the sun shone out, making everything look glad and bright with its cheerful beams. The sorrowful heart of the poor girl grew lighter and more hopeful as she went on, and throwing the thick shawl, given her as a protection from the rain by good Mrs. Burke, back from her head, she drank in new life and gladness from the soft fresh breeze that played round her face.

After she had walked for some hours, she began to feel the sense of hunger—the most imperious of all sensations—and sitting down on a grassy bank by the side of the road, she opened the little basket that had been given her by Mrs. Burke that morning, and taking out the home-made bread and milk it contained, began to eat her breakfast with the healthy appetite of youth, made still more keen by exercise in the open air.

While she and her four-footed companion were sharing the breakfast very amicably, a young woman of her own age and class of life came up. Apparently she was in bad health, for she was thin and pale, and walked slowly along. When she saw the little group on the bank, she stopped, and accosted Oonagh with the usual greeting of the Munster peasantry :

"Go mannee Dhia guth! Tháu thu thursaugh." *

"God save you kindly, honest woman," answered Oonagh. "Are you goin' far?"

"Well, not very far; only about five miles or so; but I'm not well in myself, an' 'tis more than twice as much if I was strong. Still an' all, I must walk it, whatever time it takes me to do it."

"You don't look very strong, surely, but sit down here an' rest yourself, an' take share of what God gave myself," said Oonagh kindly. "I have a good deal left, you see, an' you're heartily welcome to it."

"I'm thankful to you all the same as if I took it, but I'm not long after my own bruckist. But I'll sit down for a while to rest, for I lost my breath intirely, sthrivin' to climb up that big hill that's out fornenst you."

* *"Go mannee Dhia guth! Tháu thu thursaugh."* "God save you! You are tired."

She seated herself on the grass as she spoke, and Oonagh went on eating her bread and milk. The two girls were about the same age, and led on by the freemasonry that exists always in a greater or lesser degree with young people of the same sex and class, they were soon conversing in as friendly a manner as if they had been acquaintances of long standing.

"I'm goin' home to my own people, now," said the stranger. "I was this long time in service with a dacent widda woman, one Mrs. Mulhall, that lives about a mile at the other side ov that big hill. I liked my place very well, an' why wouldn't I, for she is a comfortable woman, that has full an' plinty, an' no wan was ever stinted in her house. She's a very plentiful woman, too, an' 'tis aisy to live in her house. But I lost my health, *foreer!* an' I made it worse by not givin' up in time, for I staid on till she could get somewan in my place, for she didn't deserve from me that I'd put her to any inconvaynince. But I was so bad this last couple ov days that I wasn't able to do much, only a hand's turn about the place now an' agin, an' at last herself said that it was as good for me to give up, an' go home to my mother before I was knocked down intirely. I was rale sorry to lave her in such a hobble, for it might be a while

before she gets another girl. You see, her place is a good bit in from the road, and very lonesome intirely, an' it isn't every wan looking out for service would find the way to it at all. I hope she'll soon be able to get a girl that will shuit her, for she has a large dairy, an' all the work ov it is too much for herself. She's getting on in years now, an' all her childher are boys, an' what does boys know ov women's work?"

"I'm affther lavin' my situation as dairymaid, an' I'm looking out for another," said Oonagh, eagerly catching at a prospect of settling down soon again. "I was always counted a good dairymaid, an', for that matther, I could put my hand to any work about a farm that I'd be set to. I wondher would Mrs. Mulhall take me in your place?"

"Oh, yarra, 'tis herself that will! You may make your mind aisy about it. 'Tis she that will sing 'Garryowen na gloria' with rale delight, when she an' you settles wid wan another, an' when she sees you hangin' up your cloak on the nail behind the dure. The honest woman is in a great pucker intirely, an' I'll go bail she'll be as proud as Punch, when a clane, dacent-looking little girl like yourself goes to hire wid her."

"But I have no character to show her," cried

Oonagh in dismay. "I was never dhruv to be on anywan's flure till ov late, an' I came away from where I was in such a hurry, that I never thought ov axin' herself for a characther, nor did she offer to give it to me, for the poor woman expects that I'll go back agin to her."

"Och! what differ does that make? Sure you can tell her that you met me, an' that I sint you on to her. I'll ingage the dacent woman will be satisfied wid my recommendation, an' ax you no questions here or there, only just what wages will you take."

"That's just what will shuit me, for at present I'm on the *shaughrán*, an' my frinds are all far away from this. But if she's any way shy ov me in regard of being a sthranger, sure I could get a line from my old parish priest, Father O'Rafferty, or from Mr. Dillon, that was my poor father's landlord, an' knows myself an' all my people. It would be the aisiest thing in life."

"Ah! don't mind about that. I'll go bail Mrs. Mulhall won't put you to any trouble ov the kind. Sure, *when she looks in your face, that will be characther enough to satisfy her.*"

"Anyhow, I'm better go on to her before any wan else gets inside ov me," said Oonagh, quite unconscious of the high compliment that the other had just

as unconsciously paid her; "an' I can't but say, honest girl, that I'm greatly obleeged to you for your civility in 'puttin' me in the way ov gettin' another place so soon."

She rose up briskly from the bank, and shaking the crumbs from her dress, proceeded to wash her feet in a little brook that ran past. That done, she put on her shoes and stockings, which up to this she had carried in her hand, smoothed down her hair, and made herself as tidy as her *al fresco* dressing-room would permit, in order that she might make a favourable impression on Mrs. Mulhall.

"Well, good-bye, an' good luck," said her new acquaintance. "Now, be sure that you tell Mrs. Mulhall *that you're a frind ov mine*, an' that it was I that sint you to her. I'll come across to see ye when I get a little stronger, an' plase goodness I'll find yourself an' herself great frinds intirely, an' why wouldn't ye? An' you needn't give me no thanks at all; sure you'd do as much for me if I was in your place."

Then those artless, unsophisticated girls shook hands, and parted as affectionately as if they had been acquainted for years, although they had met that morning for the first time, and did not even know each other's names. The delicate girl went

on slowly towards her home, and Oonagh in the direction of Mrs. Mulhall's house. After she crossed the hill, she had to go on for another mile by a *bohreen* that led to the widow's house, a comfortable cottage of the better class, but in a very secluded and lonely situation. After half-an-hour's brisk walking, the active girl opened the half door leading into the farm-house kitchen, and found there only a decent-looking elderly woman, who was employed in taking some newly-made butter out of the churn.

"God save all here," said Oonagh, going into the kitchen; "maybe you are Mrs. Mulhall?"

"My name is Mulhall, sure enough, for want ov a betther," replied the widow with a pleased smile. "It was my husband's name, but a dale ov my own people call me by the name that was on me before I was married. But, sure, a name is nothing here or there, an' makes no sort ov differ."

"Well, ma'am, I heard that you wanted a girl, an' as I want a place, I thought that maybe we might shuit wan another, so I just came to see you on the head ov it."

"You come to hear it very soon, for 'tis only a while ago since the one I had left me."

"It was her I met on the road beyant, an' she bid me come to you at wanst, an' tell you that it was

herself that sint me to you. She looked to be a very dacent little girl, but she seems to be delicate and wake in herself, poor thing!"

"Throth, she *is* a dacent little girl, as honest as the priest, an' come of a good stock. I never would part wid her if she had her health, for I had no fault to find wid her. But something or other quare came over the poor crayther ov late, an' she wasn't able to do a hand's turn, though she was rale willing. So I thought that if she was to go home to her mother for a start, she might recover herself wid the help ov her mother's care. I'm heart sorry to let her go from me, an' 'tisn't every girl that'll plase me afther her, I can tell you."

"Sure I'd do my livin' best to plase you, an' no wan can do more than her best."

"That's thrue enough. I'd like to take you in compliment to the wan that sint you, an', moreover, I like the look ov you. You seem to be a dacent, tidy girl, an' strong an' healthy to do your work. Do you know anything ov dairy business? because that's what I want a girl for mostly."

"I am a very good hand at it, an' so I ought to be, for my father had a large dairy, an' I managed it intirely. He never had any dairymaid or house-keeper but myself since my mother's death, an' 'tis

little either ov us ever thought that I'd have to go to service;" and overcome by a flood of old memories, the poor girl's voice faltered, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Whisht now, 'a rá gal! Sure you'll have a home here wid me," said the good-natured woman. "Just whip off your cloak, and set to work to make that butther, while I get ready their dinner for the boys. They wint out to work very airly, an' if I haven't dinner ready for them when they come in by-an'-by, as hungry as hawks, they'll fairly massacrays me."

"But I have a dog, ma'am," said Oonagh timidly, pointing to Bran as she spoke. All unconscious that he was in the house only on sufferance, he had already made himself quite at home, and was stretched at full length before a blazing fire. "Sure he's my poor father's dog, that went in an' out wid him, an' follyed him to fair an' market. People says 'tis foolish ov me to keep him, but so itself, I couldn't bear to part wid him."

"Oyeh, listen to her! What a speech she's makin' about the bit that a dog would ate. We're not so poor, thank goodness, as to think ov such a mane turn as to grudge his vittles to a dog belonging to any wan undher the roof wid us. Sure there's plenty ov

praties an' sour milk, an' odds an' ends ov fat bacon an' cabbage a couple ov times a week, and he may take his share wid the pigs. We'll never miss it, nor twice as much, so let him stay wid you an' welcome. You persave the poor baste knows himself that he's to stay, for he made himself very comfortable already. So now, my good girl, that is settled, an' you can tackle at wanst to the butther, for 'tis growin' late, an' I must look about the boys' dinner. As for the wages, we'll settle that by-an'-by, an' I don't think we'll have much difference on the head ov it."

Without another word, Oonagh took off her cloak, hung it on the nail behind the door, and laid her bundle and little basket aside in a corner. She then tucked up her sleeves, and washing her hands, set about making the butter with all the dexterity and quiet self-possession of a trained dairymaid. Mrs. Mulhall, in the intervals of her own employment, watched her closely, without however appearing to do so, and then thought within herself that if her new servant was as capable of doing every other sort of household work as she was of making butter, she would be a very valuable servant indeed.

When Oonagh went to bed that night in the little crib that had been occupied by her predecessor the night before, it was with a feeling of peace and rest

that almost surprised herself. She had set out in the morning sorrowful and homeless, and knowing not where she was to go, or where to find shelter for the night, and now she found herself comfortably settled in a quiet house that promised to be not unlike a home to her, and where she could earn her bread in honest independence. The widow was a kind motherly woman, somewhat on Mrs. Burke's pattern, and her sons were shy, silent young fellows, who were not much indoors, and when there gave very little trouble to anyone. Before she laid herself down to rest, the poor girl, with unfeigned piety, thanked God for His great goodness in having led her by the hand, as it were, to such a refuge, where she hoped to live in content and peace, though she could never again be happy. She was, besides, unspeakably glad to be far away from Bawnmore, and out of sight and hearing of the wedding festivities there. She did not grudge Susie the great happiness of being John Molloy's wife—soft little Susie, who was so gentle and affectionate!—but she felt that she could not have borne to witness it, at least not at present, while her wounded heart was so sore. But she knew that she would get over all that in time, and be able to meet them both in the days to come, with no stronger or warmer feeling than the love of a sister. God had

been good to her beyond all her expectations, and she would, she thought, show her gratitude to Him by putting all angry and discontented feelings from her mind, and try to look back no more on her old life.

As time wore on, Oonagh and her mistress came to like each other more and more. The widow found, to her agreeable surprise, that the servant she had lighted on in so sudden and strange a manner, was not only as good as the one whose loss she had so much deplored, but in many respects greatly her superior. She gave no encouragement to "bachelors," and, therefore, had not any of them coming after her; neither had she any "follers," for she knew no one in that strange place, and made no new acquaintances. These were cardinal virtues in the eyes of Mrs. Mulhall, who could see no higher aim in life than to amass money for her sons, and see them all well established in the world before she was taken away from them. Hard work, and careful thrift, were the watchwords of her camp, and the governing principles of her life, and she fully expected that all in her house should conform themselves to that standard as strictly as she did herself. She had fought many hard battles with her handmaidens in the times gone by, the *casus belli* being the aforesaid subject of bachelors and followers, to which were added the habit of staying out late on

Sundays after mass, taking an extra sleep in the morning when there was a pressure of business, and other enormities of a similar character, to which young girls of the servant class seemed to "seriously incline." But here was a paragon of a servant, a young girl who never grumbled at hard work, or early hours, a very handsome girl who did not care for dress or amusement, and who, in the matter of bachelors, seemed to have a heart of stone. The good woman was never weary of congratulating herself on her good fortune in having found such a treasure, but her joy was often dashed by the fear that Oonagh, owing to the temptation of getting higher wages elsewhere, or from the unaccountable longing for change natural to the youthful feminine mind, might be induced to leave her.

It would be too much if I were to say that Oonagh's life at the Mulhalls' was a very pleasant or happy one. But it was peaceful, or rather stagnant, and the days went by in one dull round of work, which, though not too laborious, was yet incessant and monotonous in the extreme. One day was the twin-brother of the one that had gone before, and the one that was to follow it, and the only variety in the girl's life was that which was caused by the changes of the seasons. Yet with this bare and

barren life she was content. She knew that she should earn her bread by the labour of her hands, and that for one place where she might be better off, and have more brightness and variety in her life, there were hundreds of others where she would be worse lodged, worse fed, and worse treated, than she was in the widow's house. If she had to work hard, she could scarcely complain when her mistress worked just as hard by her side. She was well and kindly treated by all the family, as much so as if she were one of themselves, and except that she was paid her wages punctually when they became due, she could hardly realise that she was only a servant, instead of being a daughter of the house. But though she was young and very fair—what woman that is so is not fully conscious of the gift?—yet she put away the natural joyousness of youth, and the pride that it takes in its beauty. Her heart was dead to all earthly love, slain by the cruel hand that had “handfasted” with her own. And though she now fully recognised how weakly and unworthily she had bestowed her first and last love, yet the gift had been free and spontaneous, and she could neither recall it again, nor give it away to another. It had passed out of her own keeping for ever, and now she was bankrupt and had no more to give. She could love no

more. Never again could living man be to her what the perjured and treacherous lover of her youth had been. That episode of her life was past and done with, and had left behind it a very bitter memory, a wound that was not the less painful though she kept it covered up out of sight, and asked no one for sympathy and pity. She had nothing now on earth to hope or care for; her life henceforth was to be a toilsome and solitary one, and when she died, there would not be anyone after her to shed a tear for her loss. It was a very sad life for one whose capacity for loving was so great, and whose heart was so large and true; but she faced it bravely, and with the patient courage and endurance that come to some women like a second nature. But these are not of the ordinary type, nor are they often met with. They belong to the purest and noblest type of womanhood, and to such alone is given that most rare and wonderful quality, "to suffer and be strong."

CHAPTER XVI.

OONAGH HEARS SOME NEWS.

I thought that my heart was surely dead,
In a grave where sorrow could come no more;
That the love of my youth had long since fled
To where youth itself had past on before.

But thy words have roused up my heart to life,
Out of the grave where so long it lay;
And love, with its sorrow, and joy, and strife,
Comes back again as in youth's bright day.

AND now the time had come when the hearts of men in the stately hall, as well as in the poorest cabin, were to be tried in the fiery furnace of tribulation, for the Famine reigned supreme in the land. Scarcely any-one was exempt from the terrible visitation, which percolated through all ranks and classes with more or less intensity, though, of course, it pressed hardest and heaviest on the poor. Those who had been rich now found themselves straitened, and pinched to the

utmost point of endurance, and those who had been in the ranks of the poor were now reduced to a choice between two evils, the poor-house or the grave.

To the lonely farm of the widow Mulhall, the potato blight came as silently and as surely as it did to the fields of her neighbours, for it had no respect to persons, and spared no man's land. With sinking hearts, she and her sons looked on while their potato gardens were blackening in the sun, knowing by the foul stench that rose from them how complete had been the destruction. It was in vain to expect that even the cattle would endure to eat food so diseased and putrid as the tubers that were swiftly rotting under those withered stalks. In the face of this wholesale ruin, Oonagh was scarcely less concerned than were the Mulhalls, for they had been very kind to her in their own undemonstrative fashion, and under their roof she had found a secure shelter for nearly two years, earning her bread in peaceful obscurity, and without even a wish to change so quiet and monotonous a life. In their season of prosperity, they had received her when she came to them friendless and homeless, and now in their adversity she clung to them, and made common cause with them. She worked harder and for much longer time than before, if that could be possible, just as if she was a member

of the family instead of a servant, and cheerfully submitted to many shortcomings and privations that were unknown in the old days of plenty. Soon her wages were paid less punctually than before, and at longer intervals, until, at last, so very large a sum was due to her that she hardly expected it would ever be paid. She knew that what little money was to be had should go in paying the rent, or for the purchase of food, so she never asked for any; and Mrs. Mulhall, seeing—as she could not fail to do—her patience, unflagging industry, and sterling worth, cleaved to her, and leant upon her as if the girl had been indeed her daughter.

Another summer came round, and the people who had—hoping against all hope—planted potatoes in the previous spring, now saw, with a dismay no words can describe, all the symptoms of the deadly blight reappear, and knew that once more the crop that alone stood between them and starvation was irrevocably doomed. The general ruin was complete, and beyond all hope of being retrieved, even by the severest self-denial, or the hardest and most unrelenting toil. Those who could afford to emigrate did so, and those who could not, gave up all further struggle, and either went into the poor-houses, or perished by slow starvation in the loneliness of their miserable hovels. The country

swarmed with beggars, clad, or to speak more truthfully, half covered by filthy rags, fit for nothing but to be thrown into the fire. The appearance of those wretched people spoke for them more eloquently than any words could have done. There were no cases of imposture to be discovered and denounced. In the wasted limbs, the sunken features, the yellow parchment-like skin drawn tightly over the protruding bones of the face, their pitiful story was written in characters that could not be mistaken. And with all this acute suffering there was, strange to say, a profound apathy, a weary listlessness that made no complaint, no outcry, no struggle for life. With some it was a sort of dogged endurance, with others it was an utter carelessness of what might happen, and an indifference to life, which was hardly surprising, considering what little joy life had ever had for them, and what a fearful tragedy it had become. But with others—and these were by far the greatest number—it was the most sublime patience, which had its root in that religion which was all that was left to them, and to which they clung with unswerving and passionate devotion. Never in all their sufferings did the Irish people during the Famine time lose their faith in God; they never despaired of His mercy, and firmly believed that in another world—that mysterious world beyond

the grave!—they would be amply and gloriously compensated for all the trials and afflictions they had so patiently borne in the days of their terrible probation.

It was towards the close of the second year of the Famine, and when things were at their worst all over the country, that an incident occurred that had the effect not only of stirring up once more all her old feelings in Oonagh's heart, that she had imagined were at rest for ever, but of changing the whole current of her future life.

The hour of noon had passed, and the widow's sons, after eating their scanty dinners, had gone back again to their work out of doors. Mrs. Mulhall was employed in washing crockery, and cleaning up the kitchen after dinner, and Oonagh was at her usual task of making butter, not a very laborious one now, for there were but two milch cows on the farm. All the rest had been sold to pay the rent, and buy food. As they were at work, the sunshine that streamed in through the open door was suddenly obscured, and looking up they saw a woman who, though apparently poor, was still not a mendicant, and uttering the mechanical phrase of "God save all here," came in, and sat down near the door. Neither the widow nor Oonagh had ever seen her before, but they took pity

on her, for she was old, and seemed weary from travel, and exhausted by the heat of the day. Her bare feet were covered with dust as if she had walked a long distance, and the hood of her cloak was flung back as if to let the air play upon her face.

"'Tis a close day, honest woman," said Mrs. Mulhall; "and you look very tired. Did you come a long journey?"

"Ay, in throth, an' I have a long step before I come to the ind ov my journey. But I was kilt intirely wid the hate, an' a man that I met below on the road tould me that I'd find a dacent house above the *bohreen*, where I'd be let rest myself, an' get a drink ov milk for the axin'; so I thought I may as well come on, an' rest myself until the cool ov the evening, an' take agin to the road."

"You're welcome, sure. But 'tis a pity you didn't come a little airlier, an' you could take your share ov what we had for our own dinner. But if you take a piece ov the brown cake that's just off the girdle, an' a piggin ov the new buttermilk that the little girl is taking out ov the churn, you can have 'em an' welcome. I'm sorry I have nothing else to offer you."

"Alliloo! 'Tis myself that's glad to get it, an' it isn't in every house that I'd be offered the like. May

God increase comfort to you! I didn't ate a bit since I left my own place at five o'clock this mornin', an' I'm ever since on the fut."

"Why, thin, I'm rale glad I had that much bread left afther the dinner, an' 'tis just a chance, for it might as well be the other way these hard times;" and suiting the action to the word, the widow brought the bread and milk and laid them on a chair beside the stranger. Then she drew forward another chair, as she said to rest herself, but in reality to enjoy a bit of gossip that she dearly loved, although owing to the secluded situation of her house it did not often fall in her way.

"Is your place far from this?" she asked in a little time, when the stranger, having satisfied the first keen cravings of her appetite, began to eat more slowly than at the commencement of her meal.

"Wisha, 'tis no more than twelve mile or so, but I'm not young an' strong as I was wanst upon a time, *foreer*! I'm growin' ould, an' I'm wake wid want an' hardship, an' that's why I spint the whole mornin' till now sthrivin' to get over that twelve miles. Ochone! when I was a *colleen oge*, 'tis little I'd think ov it, an' then to be up all the night if there was a fiddler or a piper to the fore. But sure it

isn't the same sort ov world now that it was in them days," and she broke off with a heavy sigh.

"It is changed wid us all," said the widow. "Sure no wan ever thought we'd live to see such terrible times."

"Though I'm poor enough, God sees, still an' all I'm not a beggar," continued the strange woman, "an' I'm goin' to St. Bridget's Well at the cliffs ov Moher, to give rounds there. My little boy has a white swellin' in his knee, an' the docthors at the infirmary sint me word to take him home, for that they can't do nothin' more for him. So when everything else failed me, I took it in head to go to St. Bridget's Well, an' give rounds there in her honour, in hopes that the good God wouldn't refuse so holy a saint if she prayed to Him for my poor boy. St. Bridget is a great saint, surely, an' I hard ov wondherful cures done on people o'count ov rounds given at her well up in Moher. I seen some ov the cures myself wid my own two eyes, thanks be to God an' St. Bridget! My boy isn't able to go himself, nor to put a fut undher him; but, sure, when I'm goin' in his place 'tis all the same as if he wint himself. An' who knows but he might yet be able to throw away the crutches, an' do his day's work as well as the best ov them. Och, mavrone! if I could

only live to see him stand up straight, an' put his fut on the ground, I didn't care how soon it plased the Lord to sind for me."

"Is he the only boy you have?"

"The only wan, *foreer*! I have a couple ov girls, but what good are they to manage a little spot ov ground? Sure, 'tis to the poor-house myself an' themselves must go unless Patsy recovers his health."

"Why, then, I suppose so."

"Och! what else? As it is, we're nearly two years back in the rint, an' there isn't a tail on the land, barrin' what belongs to the ass that brings a load of turf a couple ov times a day to the town, wid wan ov the little girls, an' keeps us in the grain ov yalla male. Oh, wisha, my heavy hathred down on it for yalla male! 'Tis only the dirth of hunger that would ever make any poor Christian ate it at all, an' never any sort ov kitchen wid it but just a grain ov salt."

"You have just as bad a story to tell ov your own place, honest woman, as what we have here. An' along wid the hunger, there's a power ov sickness goin', an' the faver is very bad about here. Is there much sickness in your place?"

"Oyeh, lay me alone! 'Tis we have the sickness, an' no ind of faver, the Lord save us! An' what

admiration is that? The poor hasn't a bit to put into their mouths but that dirty yalla male, an' not enough even ov that same. They're dyin' over wid us ov the faver, just like chickens that would have the pip."

"That's a poor story, God relieve us!"

"Sure enough it is. There's a very dacent couple down in the faver, both ov 'em, an' very bad when I was comin' away. One ov 'em wasn't expected to last the night, God bless the hearers, and the place we tell it in!"

"An' who are they, eroo?"

"He's wan John Molloy, himself. Sure they put the name ov Shawn Soogagh on him, in regard ov his bein' such good company, an' mighty pleasant intirely. His wife was a girl ov the Burkes, an' a nate, purty little girl she was when she married him. They wor well off then, for he had good manes that he got be the death ov his brother, an ould bachelor, an' she had a very good fortune for a country girl. But he run through it all, as I hear tell, sportin' an' gallivantin' at fair an' market, in place ov mindin' his bisness, an' they never knew where they wor till they wor put out ov their land. They're poor enough now, God open a gap for them, an' for every wan that's in trouble."

"Faix, every wan is poor now, if you go to that ov

it," said Mrs. Mulhall. "This day two years I had a dozen fine milkers in my bawn, an' now I have only two."

"I often think that the ind ov the world is comin'," said the strange woman, with a far-away look in her weary eyes. "But sure, if my boy got back his health, I'd never complain ov anything ever again, but strive to pull on, if I had only a male a day. Dear knows, it isn't much along wid that as it is. But sure, whatever God does, 'tisin't for a poor sinner like me to go agin His holy will. But I must be goin' now, for I have a long road to put over me before night, but thanks to the rest, and the good vittles you ga' me, I'm a'most as fresh as when I set out this mornin'. It was a good place to come to, surely. That the harm ov the year may pass you by, honest woman, and every wan that's undher your roof!"

"The day is very hot still, an' you're ould an' wake," said good-natured Mrs. Mulhall. "You're very tired as it is, an' if you take to the road agin to-day, you'll be fairly knocked up, an' not be able to give the rounds you promised. Just stay where you are for to-night in the name ov God, an' you can folly on wid your journey to-morrow."

"Why thin, 'a *vanithee*, 'tis a good offer, an' I won't go to break your word;" and the poor weary old

woman threw off her cloak, and laid her bundle on the table behind her.

"Mrs. Mulhall, could I spake just wan word to you?" said Oonagh, from her own little room.

"An' welcome. I hope there's nothing wrong wid you, poor girl," replied the widow, passing into the little room near the kitchen where Oonagh always slept. The girl, usually so quiet and composed, stood beside her bed with a wild, scared look on her face, which was deathly pale.

"Could you do without me for a few days, Mrs. Mulhall?" she said timidly.

"Why thin badly, Oonagh. I never could come at all the work meself without some help."

"Don't say that, missis, *asthore*, for I *must* go. Such you know yourself that only I was hard pushed, I wouldn't ax it."

"But *are* you hard pushed? Don't run away from me, Oonagh, unless you have rale cause."

"I *have* rale cause. I won't desave you, or hide anything from you. The poor couple that the woman outside said wor down in the faver are frinds ov mine— an' she said moreover that wan ov 'em wasn't expected to get over the day. She didn't say which ov 'em it was, but sure 'tis all wan. That poor girl is a cousin ov mine, an' she an' all her people wor throe an' firm frinds

to me when I wanted frindship, an' that's better than cousins any day. When I walked in to them a poor orphan, wid my 'God save all here,' without house or home, or a frind to turn to but themselves, they ga' me a hearty welcome, an' as long as I was on their flure, it was the same to me as my father's house. I might be wid 'em still if I liked, for it was my own wish to go, but I took a rovin' turn into my head, an' nothing else would satisfy me. I knew the boy himself, too, when I was a slip ov a girl. An' now they're both ov 'em down in the sickness, an' maybe as it is the faver, they have no wan to nurse 'em, or give 'em a drink. I must go to them, missis *asthore machree*, or my heart will break thinkin' ov 'em."

"Why thin, child, if that's the way ov it, go, an' God speed you, an' bring you back agin safe to me! I wouldn't be the manes ov stoppin' you for the full ov my *praskeen** ov golden guineas, for I might be sorry for it when I'm lyin' on my own death-bed. Avock! I'll have enough to repint ov that day, without havin' that put on top ov all the rest. But be said by me, an' wait for the cool ov the evenin'—do now, *asthore*."

* *Praskeen*—Apron.

"Oh! no, no. I'll be a'most there in the evenin'; an' you heard her tellin' how badly I'm wanted. God be wid you, 'a *vanithee*, till I come back again in a few days."

"Well, the sooner the betther. But stop a bit; wouldn't you want to bring a thrifle ov money wid you? The strange woman said that they wor very poor."

"I'm bringing a three-pound note an' some silver. 'Tis all I have now."

"Bless an' save us, little girl! how far would that go in a faver house? I'll run for another pound while you're gettin' yourself ready. 'Pon my conscience! you'll want it all, an' maybe as much more to the back ov it, before I see your face agin. Sure, you needn't spind it if there's no occasion."

"Good-bye, an' God bless you for lettin' me go," said Oonagh. "You'll see that I'll work twice as hard when I come back, to make up for all this."

"Oyeh! don't spake ov that at all. You're wid me now for two years, and this is the first holiday you ever axed me to give you. 'Twould be hard to refuse you, an' moreover, when you're in such throuble. An' if you find that poor couple as bad as what the woman outside in the kitchen says they are, you needn't fret yourself about makin' a little delay. I'll get on

bravely till you come back, never fear. An' now, honey, as you are bint on the road, the sooner you go, the sooner you'll be at your journey's ind. An' may God speed you, an' sind you back safe!"

With a quick step but a very heavy heart, the girl passed down the path that led to the public road. She had twelve miles to walk and the day was very hot, but to one who was young and strong, with a stout heart and resolute will, these things were nothing. So she stepped out at a smart pace that soon left the widow's house far behind her. Her eyes were brimming over, but she could not indulge in that luxury of women, "a good cry." She wiped away the drops as they fell, without ever slackening her pace for a moment. Her anxiety to get on was so great, that she never paused; it seemed as if every step she took gave her fresh strength and energy.

CHAPTER XVII.

OONAGH GOES ON A JOURNEY.

A fearful gift upon thy soul is laid,
Woman ! A power to suffer and to love.
Therefore thou canst so pity.

ANONYMOUS.

OONAGH never slackened her pace until she came to the nearest town, and then only for a few moments to buy tea, sugar, candles, and, lastly, a bottle of good port wine. The purchase of those absolute necessities reduced one of her notes to a few shillings; but though her purse was lightened, it made her heart glad to know that she was bringing nourishment and comfort to her sick friends. Notwithstanding her intense anxiety to get forward on her journey, she was compelled after a little time to proceed more slowly, lest she should be knocked up by walking too fast in the extreme heat of the day. But in a couple of hours the sun began to decline, the heat got less

trying, and she was able to push on again with increased speed. With feverish anxiety she counted all the mile-stones as she sped along, and absorbed by one sole desire to get on, and animated by the hope of arriving in time to be of use to those she loved in their great extremity, she never thought of the length of the journey.

In asking Mrs. Mulhall's leave to set out on her mission of charity, she had spoken of her love for her cousin, and her desire to be of use to her, but though this was true, it was not *all* the truth. Much as she loved Susie, she loved Susie's husband a great deal more. He had been the lover of her youth, the only man, with the exception of her father, that she had ever loved. She had given him up silently, when her own self-respect and womanly pride had told her that it was the right thing to do. She could not have borne to interfere with Susie's happiness, or give a wound to the affectionate heart that had always loved her dearly. She had stolen away from them like a thief when they were rich and happy, and now in their poverty and desolation she was returning to them, with no thoughts in her heart but those of kindness and helpful sympathy, and a firm resolution to be a true and loving sister to them. She never thought at all of the danger she incurred by attendance on

persons smitten with malignant typhus fever, or of the fatigue and hardship she should inevitably endure in the course of her labour of love. The large heart of the girl had no place in it for such selfish considerations as these. She had health and strength and great love to bring to the performance of the task she had set herself, and the issue of it she left in the hands of God.

Notwithstanding that she made all possible haste, it was very late in the evening when she arrived at the end of her journey. Her first proceeding, then, was to find out where the Molloy's lived, and for this purpose she went into a very decent farm-house not far from the road. As she stood at the door, a woman, who was the only person visible, came forward, and seeing that she was evidently very weary, civilly invited her to come into the kitchen, and rest herself. But Oonagh's whole soul was bent on going to her sick friends as soon as possible, so she declined the invitation.

"I'm looking for the house ov one John Molloy hereabouts; and I'd be thankful to you, honest woman, if you would point it out to me," she said.

"Is it the man that goes by the name of Shawn Soogagh? for there are two or three ov the name in this parish."

"The very same."

"Why, thin, there's not much that's 'pleasant' about the poor boy ov late times, God relieve him, an' both ov 'em! They are down in the sickness, an' so bad that I'm in dhread they won't either ov 'em get over it."

"Have they anywan to look afther 'em?" asked Oonagh with a calmness that surprised herself.

"Sorra wan but the good God."

"As you have so much feelin' for 'em, I suppose you go to see 'em now an' then?"

"I would if I had my own will, an' no one to think ov barrin' myself. But this man ov mine is terribly in dhread ov the faver, for a good many ov his own people died ov it, an' he swore that if I went next or nigh them, he wouldn't let me back agin into the house among the childher an' himself. But when he goes off to his work airy in the mornin', and is fast asleep at night, I make a run over to their place, an' bring a jug of milk wid me, for they have great thirst on 'em. But I couldn't stay long there, though indeed I'd like to do it, for my husband is a very conthrary man in himself, an' can't put up wid anywan goin' agin him at all."

"Show me where they live, honest woman, for I'm a friend ov theirs, an' I'm come a long distance to

nurse them through the sickness," cried Oonagh, almost trembling with impatience.

"Sure, I'll go myself to show you the way, an' welcome. I had the jug of milk ready, an' was to take it before himself came in from his work. You haven't far to go, for 'tis quite convanient."

She took a large jug of milk, fresh from the cow, off the dresser, and drawing the door on the latch so that the pigs would not be able to get in during her absence, she walked on by Oonagh's side slowly, for it was now dark.

"You said you wor a frind of this poor couple?" she said with kindly interest. She appeared a good-hearted creature, but in mortal terror of her lord and master, who evidently ruled his family with no very gentle hand.

"I'm related to the poor girl herself, an' long ago I'd be wid her, if I only knew how bad things wor wid her. It was only to-day that I hard they wor both ov 'em down in the sickniss from a thravellin' woman that came in to rest herself. So I only dhrew my cloak over my head, an' come away at wanst. It was hard on the dacent woman I'm in service wid to let me go, for she has a good dale to do, an' no wan but myself to help her; but she's a good, kind soul, an' when she seen how unaisy I was, she only said God

speed me. I'm glad I got her consint, but all the same I'd come whether I got it or no."

"I suppose so."

"Fake an' sure I would. Is there any child at all in this misfortunate house?"

"Wisha, there is, God look on it! Wan dawney, delicate little scrap ov a thing, that I'm thinking won't be very long behind 'em. He was born a wake little object, an' he never got any way sthrong, for the poor mother never had anything to give him but the yalla male, an' sure what good is that?"

"Hadn't they any milk to give their delicate little child?"

"Sorra dhrop ov milk they had for many a long day. The only cow they had was canted for the rirt, an' it gave her such a turn that she took her labour suddent, an' her poor little baby came into the world before his time. They pulled on middlin', howsomever, as long as the praties lasted, but when *they* wor gone the poor couple wint to the bad intirely. She hadn't a screed ov clothes on her, an' the wild look of the hunger was in both her eyes. Many a time, when she'd be goin' past the dure, I'd make her come in to give her a taste of vittles, but 'tis little the poor crayther would take for herself, only hidin' it in her apron to bring home to the child."

"An' didn't John do nothing to support his family?"

"Erra, what could the poor boy do? Now an' agin he'd get a day's work from the farmers about here, but it wasn't often, an' the wages wor so low, that what he airned went neither here or there. 'Tis little work he could do, for he got very wake when he hadn't the food to keep him up, though to tell the thruth ov him, he'd work if he was able."

Oonagh closed her eyes, and felt as if she was on the point of fainting, but she strove hard to conquer the weakness, for she knew that everything depended on her strength and courage.

"Where is this poor child now?" she asked in a voice that struggled to be firm.

"Asleep in my house along wid my own childher. I took him home wid me the day his mother fell sick, an' he's wid us ever since. I was greatly in dhread that himself would object to it, an' sind away the poor little crayther again, but he didn't. He's a quare man in some ways, still an' all he has good turns in him. We're only poor strugglin' people, but we'd be harder set than what we are, when we'd miss the dhrop ov milk that a little child ov two years old would drink from morning till night."

"May God reward you, honest woman, an' rise up

frinds for your own childher when they most want it!" exclaimed Oonagh, pressing the hand of her companion.

"Eyeh, sure, that's nothing at all. I'm only heart sorry that I can't do any more for the poor couple. But here we are at their house, an' here's the jug of milk for you. I'd go in wid you, but himself will be comin' home to supper, an' if I'm not in the house before him, he'll be like nothing in the world but a bull in the pound. But as soon as ever he's off to his work in the mornin', I'll be surely hither to see how ye all get through the night. Take care ov the stones goin' up to the dure, an' see that you don't tumble into a little brook that's a wan side the house."

She went away back to her home, and Oonagh, with her basket of groceries in one hand, and the jug of milk in the other, made her way as well as the increasing darkness would allow her, to the door, which was wide open. There was no light within but such as came from a few half-burned sods of turf, that were smouldering on the hearthstone. Guided by this faint light she went straight towards it, and laying the jug down on the floor, felt in her basket for one of the candles she was so provident as to have brought with her. As soon as it was lighted, she looked round for a candlestick to put it in, but

seeing none, she stuck it into an empty bottle that stood beside the one pane of cracked and dirty glass that did duty for a window. Then, with the light in her hand, she looked about her, and her heart sunk at the scene of misery that presented itself. There was an old table on three legs, a straw chair, a couple of stools made of twisted straw, a few of the most necessary kitchen utensils, and in a distant corner was a most wretched-looking bed, with an old chest that served the purpose of a table beside it. A couple of wooden "piggins," and some few articles of the cheapest crockeryware, completed the list of the furniture. The thatch was hanging down from the roof in many places, and the walls, originally built of mud and rubble, had never been either plastered or whitewashed, and were now perfectly black from the combined effects of time and turf smoke.

Oonagh had latterly seen a great many poor cabins, but none of them were half so bad as this most wretched place. As if to complete the horror of such an abode, a sickening odour, that was most offensive, pervaded the air, almost intolerable to one who had but just come in out of the pure, sweet atmosphere of the summer evening.

It was only by degrees she was able, with the

imperfect light of the candle, to take in all that I have tried to describe in a few words. After a little she advanced to the bed, and laid the candle on the chest beside it, but in the shadow, so that its light might not awake its sleeping occupant. With a bursting heart and hushed breath she looked down on the miserable wreck that lay before her. Was this starved-out creature, dying not less surely of famine than of disease on those filthy rags, the soft, fair girl who had been the companion of her youth? Was this wasted woman, prematurely aged, through whose yellow, shrivelled skin the sharp bones were working their way, the beautiful Susie Burke, who, reared in comfort, had never known what pain or sorrow meant, until her wedding day? All that remained of her former beauty was the rich golden hair, that even sickness and neglect could not deprive of its silky gloss. It was a sad sight, and as Oonagh looked on it she compressed her lips tightly together, lest she should scream aloud in the greatness of her anguish and horror.

She sat down on the chest beside the bed, dumb and tearless, unable to do anything but think. She remembered as it if were but yesterday the evening she had come to Bawnmore, footsore and weary, and when Susie, with a cry of joy, had cast herself into

her arms in the warmth of her welcome, and insisted that she should share her own bed. How loving and sisterly Susie had been to her, not only then, but for all the time that they had remained together; how she had striven to make the desolate girl forget her orphanhood, and make herself at home by a strange hearth. It all came back as in a panorama, scene after scene, and kindness following upon kindness. Nothing was forgotten. How could it be, when it all had happened only three short years ago?

And while yet those sorrowful memories were crowding on her mind, Susie awoke, and by the faint smile that stole over her face, she showed that she recognised who it was that was watching beside her.

"Do you know me, *thrifure machree*?"* said Oonagh, as she stooped down to kiss the wasted cheek.

"Oonagh! Oonagh 'a *colleen dhuv dheelish*!"† replied Susie faintly, "you wor a long time, Oonagh, but I knew you'd come at last."

"Oh! sure long ago I'd come if I only knew how it was wid you; you may be sure ov that. Oh Shusy, my heart's darlin', why didn't you sind for me when you got sick?"

* *Thrifure machree*—Sister of my heart.

† 'A *colleen dhuv dheelish*—My darling dark girl.

"Give me a drink, Oonagh; I'm lost wid the dhruth. I think there's some milk on the chest near you."

Oonagh looked with disgust on something in a bowl beside the bed. It had been milk in the morning, but now, owing to the heat of the weather and the close air of the cabin, was of the consistency of liver, and covered over with flies. In a moment she had knocked the top off a bottle of the wine in her basket, by striking it on the edge of the chest, and pouring some of it into a cup, held it to Susie's lips, who drank it all with feverish eagerness. The generous liquor did its work, and, in a few minutes, the poor girl was so far revived as to be able to press the loving arms that were cast around her, and to speak a few words.

"Did you see John, Oonagh?"

"No, *avourneen*, where is he?"

"In the little room inside," and she pointed feebly with her lean forefinger to a place separated from the outer kitchen by a mud partition that did not reach up to the roof. "He has the sickness too, poor fellow, but he's asleep now, I'm sure, as I was myself when you came in."

"I will go an' look afther him in a minute."

"Don't lave me for a bit, darlin', for I have some-

thing to say to you. But I'm gettin' sleepy, an' I can't remember it now."

"Don't mind thinkin' ov it, but thry an' get another sleep; sure you can tell it to me when you wake. I won't lave the place, never fear, till you're well agin. Thry now an' sleep, *asthore*; 'tis the little drop ov wine that's makin' you dhrowsy."

Oonagh settled the wretched bed-clothes as comfortably as she could, and spreading her own cloak over all, sat down again on the old chest. In a short time, she saw poor Susie's eyes close, and the lines in her face—young as she was, they were many and deep—relax in profound repose. When Oonagh was quite sure that she was asleep, she rose up silently, and taking the candle again, went into the inner room where the sick man was also sleeping. At least, she supposed he was, for since she had entered the house she had not heard a sound from that room, and Susie had told her but now that he was sleeping. At the entrance she was almost overpowered by the foul air and suffocating odour, driving her back to the kitchen, but she drew a long breath, and muttering a prayer in her native language that God would assist and strengthen her, she took courage once more, and passed into the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OONAGH MEETS "PLEASANT JOHN" ONCE MORE.

Here he lies,
Who should have been—my own !
BARRY CORNWALL.

As Oonagh advanced into this dismal den, that had neither door nor window, she had to hold the light aloft to enable her to proceed cautiously, lest she should stumble and so make a noise that would awaken the sleeper. But her apprehension was groundless, for there was no obstacle to impede her progress ; nothing was there but a heap of straw at the far end, and a rickety-looking wooden stool beside it, on which was a cup completely empty. She laid the candle down softly, and then turned round to the wretched apology for a bed, on which lay, sick unto death, the lover of her youth.

A mist came suddenly over her eyes, and for a

short time her sight was so blurred that she could see nothing. But very soon this cleared away, and she stooped down to look more closely at the sleeping man. She could not see his face, for it was in the shadow, nor did she hear him breathe, though she bent down so low that she almost touched him. Awestruck by the profound silence, a terrible suspicion broke upon her.

"Awake, John," she said softly, "awake, an' spake to me. I am here, Oonagh, an' I came to nurse yourself, an' poor Shusy."

There was no answer, and full of a terror that made her blood run cold, she drew down the ragged quilt, which was all in the nature of bedclothes that was on that miserable couch, and placed her hand on his heart to ascertain if he still lived. But that heart, on which she laid her warm hand so softly, would never beat again. The deathly cold that met her touch made her start back involuntarily, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she kept herself from screaming aloud. But in that one moment of supreme anguish her usual presence of mind did not desert her. She was no fine lady who would give way to hysterics, or indulge herself by making loud outcries, but a simple, healthy, country girl, who did not know what was meant by "nerves," and had all her feelings

well under restraint. Now remembering that in all human probability Susie's life depended on having a long undisturbed sleep, she controlled herself by a mighty effort, and stood silently with straining eyes and clasped hands, a veritable statue of horror.

The unfortunate man must have been dead for many hours, for his body was as cold and rigid as marble. He had died alone! There was no kind hand near him at the last to close his eyes, for they were wide open, and their fixed and glassy stare was perfectly horrible to look on. The worn face was half covered by a stubbly black beard of a fortnight's growth, and was like nothing earthly but a yellow parchment mask, wrinkled, haggard, and careworn. The throat and chest, laid bare by having the quilt drawn down, were so thin that the bones were in a manner held together only by the skin, and could literally be counted. It was a shocking sight, the body of this poor wretch that had died of famine! He had worked as a labourer beside men who were healthy and tolerably well fed, and tried to keep up with them till sheer weakness and exhaustion had compelled him to fall out of the ranks. Will and determination are good things, but they cannot supply the place of food, or make up for the want of it. The contest between will

and starvation was too unequal, and as a matter of course, the latter won, particularly when its natural and certain ally, typhus fever, came in to finish the battle. He was completely vanquished, like many another man in that unhappy time, and, throwing down the spade he was no longer able to lift, crept back to his wretched home, to die without sympathy or succour.

There was no bashfulness about Oonagh now, no proud reserve, or womanly shame. She knelt down beside the dead man, she twined her arms round his neck, she clasped the wasted body to her bosom, she rained down bitter, scalding tears on the cold, pallid face. He was her own now, at last—this false sweetheart, for whose sake she had rejected many a good man's proffered love—her very own! He had been loosed from the tie that bound him to another woman, death did them part, and he had passed away to that world where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Who or what could prevent her now from showing her love, the love that had always been steady and true, that had never died? She had loved him when he was a handsome young man—the "pleasant" John of the old times; she had loved him when he had cruelly flung her from him because of her poverty; but she never loved him so well as now when he

lay dead between her arms—dead—on a heap of rotten straw in that foul and darksome den! And with this great undying love was blended an unutterable pity for the poor victim of famine, who had endured, in addition to his own suffering, the great agony of seeing his wife and child perishing of hunger, while he was powerless to relieve them. It was a frightful thing to her to know that he had died *alone!*—died without the clasp of a friendly hand, or the sound of a tender voice to whisper words of human love or hope in God to the ear that was fast closing to all earthly sounds, and the feebly fluttering heart to which all earthly things would soon be nothing.

She rocked herself to and fro, as all her countrywomen do when in great affliction, and moaned over him with a low but very bitter cry. She remembered no longer her slighted love, her wounded pride, her wasted youth, her joyless womanhood. Everything was forgotten, forgiven; and she could think only that he had suffered and sorrowed, and lay within her arms—starved to death!

“John, my best beloved, I am with you at last,” she moaned in the beautiful and expressive language of her native country, than which none on the earth is so rich in terms of love, endearment, or sorrow. “Though you can neither see or hear

me, I am here. You are my own at last—at last you are my own, and no one can take you from me. You flung away my love as if it was only a worthless weed, and made a plaything of the poor heart that would have followed you all over the world, for no greater reward than one loving word at the end. But I came back to you, oh white spot of my soul! when everyone else had deserted you, and left you to die untended and alone. Oh sweet, ever in my ears was the sound of your voice! gentle and gracious were all your words and ways to me! It was not for nothing that you were called pleasant, for you won all hearts, and no one who knew you could help loving you. Where are they all now?—they who took delight in your handsome young face and pleasant ways, and there is no one but Oonagh—poor forsaken, desolate Oonagh!—to raise the *caoine* over the dead body of her beloved."

She clasped her arms more tightly round the dead man, and her whole frame was shaken by the violence of her sobs. Still, in the terrible intensity of her anguish, she remembered the sleeper outside, and also that affection for the dead should give way before duty for the living.

"Not yet, oh! not yet, core of my heart, can the death-cry be chanted over your cold remains," she

resumed, still speaking in her own poetical Irish; "silent tears are all now that poor Oonagh can give to her beloved, for she has to think for the living as well as to bewail the dead. She has to think for the friend of her youth, of the sweet fair girl that left her kindred and happy home to face the world by your side. A hard world it was to both of you, and ye saw dark days together in it, but ye were patient, and the love ye had for each other sweetened your bitter cup. But she—the soft, fair, innocent, loving one!—she never knew the grief she caused when she took you from me. But I loved you always, always, though I shut up my love in my own heart; and dear John, I will give it now to your wife and child, because they *are* yours. I will work for them as I would have done for you, love them as I loved you, and spend my life in their service. Oh, my love! my first and my last love! here, kneeling by your side, with my arms round you, and in the presence of God, who sees and hears me, I make you this promise."

Somewhat relieved and comforted by having made this solemn vow, Oonagh gazed once more on the dead face before she rose from her knees. As she did so a flood of old memories came rushing back on her soul;

her happy youth; her peaceful home; her good father's unwearied care and love; all rose up before her, bright and rose-coloured, in a succession of well-remembered scenes. But her reverie was broken by a faint moan from the outer room, reminding her that the radiant visions of the past must give way to the imperative necessities of the present; and rising up quickly she went out to the bedside of the sick girl.

As soon as she looked at Susie again, she saw with dismay that a great and fatal change had taken place in her illness, and that she was now dying beyond all doubt. The jaw had fallen, the nose was pinched and sharp, the breath came in short, quick gasps, and a dull, gray, leaden hue had overspread the face.

Oonagh quickly poured more wine into the cup and held it to Susie's lips, but it ran down again at the corners of the mouth. The dying girl had lost the power of swallowing it, and then Oonagh knew that the end was indeed come. It was not a matter of hours but of moments.

"Did you see poor John?" she said very faintly, thinking in that supreme hour more of him than of herself.

"Yes, darlin', I seen him."

"I wish that I could see him too, Oonagh. I can't put him out ov my mind night or day."

"You will see him soon now, '*a hudyeen thael!*'* *very soon.*" It was evident that the dying girl understood what Oonagh meant, for though she spoke no word, she raised her eyes to heaven, and an expression that was half joy, and half resignation, passed over her face. But it soon faded away, and in its place came one of anxiety and care.

"Something is troublin' you, *asthore*. Tell it now to your own Oonagh," and as she spake she drew the girl's head to rest on her bosom.

"The child, Oonagh! the weeny thing that's hardly two years old! 'Tis goin' between me an' God to think that he'll be rared in the workhouse."

"*Acushla sthoreen*, let not that thought go between your soul an' God! Your child an' John's child shall never be rared in the workhouse, nor ever ate a morsel of charity bread as long as I live. I promised that on my knees when I was inside there spakin' to *him*, an' now I promise it over again to you. Don't let that child be throublin' you, for you have no call to do it. For your sake, Shusy, and for his father's sake, I'll take that child, an' he'll be like my own to me. I'll

* '*A hudyeen thael!*'—My share of the world you are.

work my fingers to the bone for him, an' if he ever knows what cold and hunger manes, it will be when the daisies are growin' over me in Kilcarrol churchyard. I'll do my best for him ; I can't go any farther than that."

"It is enough," said Susie in Irish. "Oonagh of the truthful tongue and loving heart! it is enough. Stoop down and kiss me, Oonagh, and hold me fast, so that I may die in your arms."

She never spoke again, but lay quite motionless on Oonagh's breast. In a little time she became quite insensible, and Oonagh laid her gently back, for the candle was almost burned out, and if she did not light another quickly she would be in the darkness, a thing not to be thought of in that wretched house of death. When another candle was lighted, she sat down again, and a feeling of intense terror that she could not control came over her whole being. The thought that until morning she would be the only living creature in that house, with a corpse on either side of her, was more than she could bear. The stout heart and the steady nerves, that had never before failed her, now utterly gave way, and with a wild piercing cry she fled out of the house.

Just as she had reached the high road she heard the sound of a horse's hoofs, and presently in the soft

light of the August night she saw a solitary horseman riding towards her.

"Stop! whoever you are," she cried in a voice that quivered with intense excitement, "stop, for the love ov God!"

Thus adjured, the horseman pulled up, and then she saw to her great relief that he was a clergyman.

"It was the good God that sent you here to-night," she exclaimed. "There's a woman dyin' in that house. Come in, and give her the last absolution."

"My good woman, I am not a Catholic priest, but I am a clergyman, though not one of your creed," replied the stranger mildly; "my name is Crawford, and I am the rector of this parish."

"Oh, what differ does it make? You're a good man, I'm sure, whoever you are, an' you won't refuse to come wid me?" she pleaded, encouraged by his gentle manner. "There's a man dead in that sorrowful house, an' his wife is all but dead, if she isn't dead already. There is no livin' person wid 'em but me, an' if I have to stay there by myself till mornin', I'm sure I'll go mad."

"You are greatly excited, my poor girl," said Mr. Crawford; "but I can scarcely wonder at it under the circumstances. I am just come from the

death-bed of one of my parishioners, and am tired and worn out, but I will go with you if it will give you any comfort or courage."

He dismounted, and throwing the bridle of his horse over the broken post of what had once been a gate, followed her into the house. When he looked on the poor, pallid, waxen image that was extended on the bed, he knew that life, with all its sorrow and suffering, was over; but Oonagh in her distracted state did not see this.

"Oh, sir, you are a clergyman; won't you say a prayer for her, won't you say a prayer?"

"Certainly I will," he replied; and drawing from his pocket the Book of Common Prayer, commenced reading, in a solemn and reverent voice, that most beautiful composition, the burial service of the English Church, beginning with the words, "I am the resurrection and the life."

When the clergyman had read to the end, he said to her, in a tone that was very gentle and pitiful: "My poor girl, your friend has been dead for some time, and you must now think of yourself. This is a sad, dismal place for you to be in, alone as you are."

"Oh, sir, you won't lave me here by myself?" she cried in wild terror, laying her hand on his

arm. "If you go away I'm in dhread that I'll die."

"No, my poor girl, you will not. I must go, for if I did not my family would be seriously alarmed, particularly my wife, who is not in good health. But for this I would willingly remain with you. You will keep yourself as quiet as you can, and as soon as I reach home I shall send a decent woman to keep you company, and assist you in paying the last sad duties to these poor dead people. I shall also send the relieving officer to see about the interment. Are you their sister?"

"No, your worship—your reverence I mane; but I am a frind, an' the only wan, *foreer*! that they had in the whole world."

"That fact is quite apparent," said Mr. Crawford, with a glance round the miserable place. "Did you live with this poor couple?"

"Oyeh, no, sir. I'm in service wid wan Mrs. Mulhall, a widda woman, twelve miles away, an' it was only 'istherday, by the greatest chance, that I hard they wor sick at all. I came off at wanst, thinkin' that I'd be ov some service to them, an' nurse them through the sickness. But *och, mavrone*! I was too late, for wan ov 'em," pointing to the inner room, "was dead, an' this poor thing dyin' fast."

"Have you had any food since you left home?"

"Sorra morsel, your reverence. Sure I never thought ov it at all. It wasn't food that was throublin' me."

"You walked twelve miles yesterday afternoon, and have been ever since in this pest-house without food of any kind!" exclaimed the good clergyman, aghast. "My poor girl! 'tis no wonder that you are nervous and overwrought. Is there any food in the house?"

"Oh, yes, sir. There's a few things that I brought wid me when I come; tay, an' sugar, an' bread, an' a bottle of good wine."

"All right. The tea and sugar will do well another time, but the good wine and the bread will come in very handy just now. Where are they?"

"Here, sir."

He broke off a piece from the loaf, as he did not see any knife about, and then, in a very peremptory manner, he bade her eat it at once. He watched her while she was eating with a pleased look on his face, and then pouring more than a glassful of the wine into the cup, made her take that also.

"I must now go," he said. "As it is, my family are, I am sure, very anxious about me, for I have been absent a longer time than usual. But before leaving you I must say that I wish that I, and everyone I

loved, could boast of having as true and loyal a friend in need, as you have proved yourself this night to be."

He shook hands with her kindly, and, going outside, mounted his horse and rode off at a good smart trot. Oonagh saw him to the door with the candle in her hand, and when she returned to the house sat down near the bed, prepared to keep her dreary watch until morning, when the woman that the clergyman would send to her should arrive. But the wine, to which she was wholly unaccustomed, soon made her drowsy, and the fatigue of her long walk, added to the effects of the wine, gave the poor, weary creature—wearied out in mind as well as in body—the best and surest of all medicines, sleep, as the kind clergyman had shrewdly anticipated. Gradually she began to lose consciousness, her eyes closed involuntarily, and slipping down on the floor, with her head leaning on the side of the bed, Oonagh was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

OONAGH ADOPTS HER LOVER'S SON.

Dejected Pity by his side,
Her soul-subduing voice applied.

COLLINS, *Ode on the Passions*.

A HAND laid lightly on Oonagh's shoulder awoke her after a few hours of sleep, that, notwithstanding her uneasy position and dismal surroundings, was sound and refreshing, for she was young and very weary, and youth and nature will not endure the deprivations of their just rights. When she opened her eyes, she saw bending over her the compassionate face of the good woman who had shown her the way to the house on the previous evening. It was now broad day, and Oonagh knew that she had slept several hours. One glance at the bed was quite sufficient to arouse her fully, and she started to her feet as if she had got an electric shock.

"Musha, this was a terrible place for you to pass the night in," said the visitor, "an' no wan to keep you company, nor even a light to help you to keep up your heart. Fake 'm sure you're the courageousest woman I ever knew, or hard tell ov aither."

"I had a candle," replied Oonagh, pointing to the bottle, "but I suppose it burned down afther I fell asleep. I brought it here wid me, and a few other little matters that I thought would be ov use here, but they aren't wanting now, *foreer!* They don't want anything any more from me, nor from any wan else. Oh, missis, I don't know your name, but so itself, sure you're a friend, my very heart is breakin' wid the dинth ov grief an' throuble," and flinging herself on the woman's breast she wept bitterly.

"Whisht now, whisht, *asthore géal*, don't cry that a way; an' my name is Sally, an' you needn't be callin' me Mrs. this, or that, only just Sally;" and she wound her arms round the poor weeping girl, while her own tears fell fast. "An' I was so onaisy all the evenin' afther lavin' you here, that I hardly closed an eye all night. I thought twinty times to get up out of the bed and come hither to you, only that I have a little baby that's very fractious by rason ov teethin', an' if I left her the man ov the house would nearly take my life when I'd come home again.

But he's gone off now to the bog for a good while, an' I run across wid a grain ov tay an' sugar to get a bit ov bruckfast for yourself an' myself. Dear knows we both ov us want something to rise our hearts afther the night, for I own to goodness the poor little baby was so cross that I was awake the whole night o'count ov her."

"I brought tay and sugar wid me as well as the candles. You'll find 'em on the table over there."

"Well, what differ does that make? sure 'tis all the same which ov us owns the tay, when we're both goin' to drink it. An' now, *alannah*, do you go outside from this sorrowful place for a start, while I make a fire and bile the kittle. You see I brought itself an' a taypot along wid me, an' the seed ov the fire in an ould saucepan."

The good-natured woman pushed Oonagh outside the door with a little gentle force, and soon the sweet fresh air of early morning revived in some degree the weary limbs and sad heart of the poor worn-out girl. The grass was thickly covered with dew-drops, that shone and sparkled in the early sunshine, that, full of hope and brightness, brought with it another day to bless and gladden the world. A cow, eager to be relieved of her milk, was lowing in the next field,

and from some houses not far distant came the sounds of dogs barking, and of the "cock's shrill clarion," as, with sleek plumage and arrogant strut, he led his numerous family forth for the day. There was a little brook running with cheerful music past the cabin, and Oonagh bathed her hot face and swollen eyes in its cooling water, and felt soothed and refreshed. Then she washed her hands and feet, and smoothed down her long hair that had escaped from its comb, and was flowing about her shoulders in dusky waves.

And when, at the end of half-an-hour, Sally brought out breakfast to be eaten beside the brook, saying that "it was a cheerfuler place to eat in than the cabin," she was not a little surprised to find that her new acquaintance was a very pretty girl, and a much more respectable-looking person than she could imagine any friend of the Molloy's would be.

While they were at breakfast the woman arrived who was sent by Mr. Crawford, for he was faithful to his promise, and she was soon followed by others who lived in the neighbourhood. They at once proceeded to make themselves useful by "laying out" the bodies of the wretched husband and wife, that had died so miserably within a few hours of each other. Their assistance was gladly accepted by Oonagh, who felt herself quite unequal to making

the least exertion, and by Sally, who was obliged to return home to nurse her sick baby, and what was of more importance, to have his breakfast ready for her lord and master when he would come back from the bog. The good-hearted creature persuaded Oonagh to accompany her and remain for a short time, until the ghastly business at the cabin had been completed. The poor girl was not unwilling to be spared all participation in it, and in the sadness and loneliness of her great sorrow she clung to one who, as well as being of her own sex, had shown her so much sympathy and kindness.

When they arrived at Sally's house, they found that her husband was already come, and was making down a fire, while a number of children of all ages were playing about. As the two women entered the house, he looked up from his employment with a dark scowl on his face, a face that even in its best aspect could scarcely be called good-looking.

"This is a frind ov mine, Jim," said Sally in a very apologetic tone, as she presented Oonagh; "an' she's a frind ov the poor couple beyant, that died last night, both ov' em, God bless the hearers, an' the place we tell it in! I made her come over wid me for a while, till a few dacent women that are there are layin' out the two corps."

No matter what the disposition of an Irish peasant may be, whether rough and surly, or gentle and amiable, still he is never forgetful of the sacred duties of hospitality. They all have an instinctive knowledge of the sacredness of their own roof-tree, and act up to that knowledge with a sincere, unaffected courtesy that is as graceful as it is ready and spontaneous. This man was no exception to this almost universal rule, and he made the newcomer welcome in his own uncouth fashion.

"You're heartily welcome, miss, an' you come in good time, for the bruck'ist will soon be ready. I'm sorry the place isn't more comfortable for you, but we have a fractious baby that never lets the cry out ov her mouth, an' as herself went out this mornin', the whole house is at sixes and sevens, for I'm a poor hand at doin' women's work."

"I'll have everything all right in no time," said Sally cheerfully, as she began bustling about to prepare breakfast for the family, while her goodman lighted his pipe, and sat smoking it in silence. Oonagh sat silent too, watching the children as they played about the kitchen, and wondering, with a vague, sad yearning at her heart, if any of them was the child of John Molloy. At last, unable to restrain herself any longer, she suddenly said to Sally :

"Which of all these fine childher belongs to the poor couple that's lyin' dead beyant there?"

"Nera wan ov them is little Johnny," replied Sally. "Them is all my own, an' though I say it that oughn't to say it, they're as strong an' fine a set ov childher as wor ever on a poor woman's flure. I wish that poor little Johnny was only half as strong as any ov them. He's delicate in himself, the poor little scrap, an' no admiration in it, for since he was born till he came to us, I don't think he ever had enough to eat, surely not of the food that was fit for him. He has a hard life on before him, if he's spared; an' I'm afraid he won't have any strinth to fight the battle that he'll have to fight. But come wid me, an' I'll show him to you, the poor little *pástheen*!"*

Oonagh, rising up, followed Sally into an inner room, where two children lay side by side in a wicker-work contrivance that was half bed and half cradle. One of them, the delinquent that had cried all night, was fast asleep, fairly exhausted from crying; and the other, little Johnny, was awake, and fully dressed in the poor clothes that he wore every day.

"He was awake when I got up this mornin'," said Sally, "so I put his bits ov rags on him, for

* *Pástheen*—Child.

I knew well that I never would have time to do it when I'd come back. An' I tould him that I was goin' out for a start, an' that he was to mind the baby for me till I came back, an' you'd think that he almost undherstud me, for there he is ever since, an' she's fast asleep alongside ov him."

"I'll take him outside wid me while you're givin' their bruck'ist to himself an' the childher," said Oonagh, whose heart yearned to the desolate little orphan. She bent down over him with her whole soul in her eyes, and the child, seeing the loving look in her face, threw his little arms round her neck, and nestled his head in her bosom. Something in her look and face might have reminded him of his mother. With a great sob, she gathered him into her arms, and passing swiftly out of the house, fled away with her new-found treasure to a considerable distance.

She sat down under the screen of a high thick hedge, and wept passionately over the unconscious infant. All the sweet pity of her woman's nature went out to it; orphaned—deprived of both parents in one day—flung helpless and forlorn on the cold charity of a hard world in his very infancy, how could she help pitying him with her whole soul? She called to mind how dear his father had been to her

in the happy old times when her heart was as light and as glad as the day was long. She had forgiven him the cruel desertion, the heartless treatment that had made even her trusting heart ashamed of ever having loved so unworthy a man. But if any remnants of anger remained in her mind, now, with the child on her lap, she put it aside for ever; all was condoned. And it was Susie's child as well as John's!—Susie, who had been a true sister to her in the days of her sorrow and adversity, and who had said to her almost with her last breath: "Oonagh, my own Oonagh!" They were both lying dead together in the same miserable hovel, and in all the world their orphan boy had no friend but herself. If *she* failed him, he should go to the poor-house.

But she had promised the parents—one, when he was dead, and the other while she still lived, that their child should not be brought up in the work-house, and should never, while she lived, eat a morsel of charity bread; and she would keep that promise. A promise made to the dead was, or ought to be, a very sacred thing. It would be sacred to her. She would never marry—on that point she had made up her mind long ago;—she was not destined by God to be the joyful mother of any child. But for all that, her work had been cut out for her, and lay

ready to her hand. Had not God, the Father of the fatherless, led her step by step to where this little lamb lay, shorn to the very quick? At this thought her tears ceased to flow, and strength and courage came into her heart. She bent once more over the child, kissed its dewy lips with a solemn tenderness, and raising her eyes to Heaven, she thanked God for the blessing He had sent her, and resolved, with voiceless lips, but a full earnest heart, that she would be faithful to the trust He had reposed in her, and to the voluntary promise she had made to the dead. The child of John and Susie should be henceforth hers, to love it, to toil for it, to garner her whole heart in it. She was young, strong, and accustomed to labour, and she felt sure that God would help her, and smooth the path before her and the poor desolate little one that He had sent to her.

Once more she wiped away her tears with a resolute hand, and said to herself that she would cry no more. The season for weeping was gone by, and that for action was come. She would have no time, henceforth, for weeping, for she had a great work to do, and, God helping her, she would do it. She would work hard, work untiringly, work in season and out of season, for nothing less than downright hard, honest work could ever accomplish the task that she had set

herself. If a week before that day anyone had told her how soon and how greatly she would feel comforted, what a new and absorbing interest would have entered into her life, she would have listened with incredulity; but now, not alone was she comforted, but a feeling of exquisite peace and rest, to which she had been long a stranger, filled her whole heart. She had something now for which to live and work, something to love, something that would be her very own.

When she returned to the house, with the child asleep in her arms, she found Sally cleaning up after having given her family their breakfast, and her husband preparing to go off to his work. Oonagh sat down beside him regardless of the frown that gathered on his brow, for he imagined she was going to beg from him something towards defraying the funeral expenses of little Johnny's unfortunate parents.

"I want to spake to you about the berrin' ov this poor couple beyant," she said in a voice the calmness of which surprised herself.

"I don't know' nothing whatsoever about it," was his surly reply. "I'm a very poor hard-working man, wid a long family ov my own, an' no wan has a right to expect me to lose be sthrangers. I suppose the poor-house people'll sind coffins, an' do whatever is right to be done."

"They won't be berrid in poor-house coffins, plase God, nor will any wan be axed to lose as much as a penny by them. I am the nearest relation ov the poor girl, for I hear her father an' mother are dead, an' her brother is gone to America, an' I've money to spare that will pay for a dacent funeral without axin' help from any person. The only charity I'll ax ov you, is to go to the nearest town an' buy the coffins, an' help me to bury the poor misfortunate couple dacently, as every wan that ever came before them wor berrid. An' I'll be just as thankful to you, honest man, as if you wor to do it all at your own expinse."

As soon as the farmer understood that she had money, and was willing to have everything at her own cost, his manner changed, and he became quite generous and amiable. He was not a bad-hearted man by any means, but extremely penurious; and when he could do a kindness without being at a loss by it, he was always willing, and gave his time and trouble readily enough. He now 'professed himself very glad to be of use, and prepared at once to set off to the nearest town in order to do her errand.

"You can do me a great kindness, and a great charity for God besides," she said. "It's to let this poor little child stop here for a while, till I look about

me, an' see what I can best do wid him. I'll pay you whatever is fair for his keep, and be very thankful to you into the bargain. He's too young an' delicate to take him away to a strange place yet awhile, an' he'd be frettin' for the *vanithee* that's so fond ov him, an' for the children that he's used to. You see, I couldn't look afther him myself, for I'm only a poor servant airnin' my wages; but wid God's help, I'll be able to pay you for him, an' I won't feel the loss at the ind ov the year."

"An' do you mane to tell me that though you're only a servant, you'll take the whole care an' support ov this strange child on your back!" he exclaimed, perfectly astonished at a disinterestedness that he was himself totally incapable of, and could not comprehend in another.

"Sure I am no sthranger. His mother was my cousin, an' his father—well, his father was a neighbour's son, an' used to come to my father's house when I was younger an' happier than what I'm now. I can't bear to think that their child would be sint to the poor-house, an' while I live an' have my health, he never shall go there. I brought money wid me here, an' I have good wages from the dacent woman I'm in service wid. I don't wrong any wan in taking the care ov this poor child on me, for all that ever loved

me are undher the sod, *foreer!* an' no wan now alive has any call to my airnin's. Sure, if the child is a care an' expinse to me now, he'll be a comfort to me in my old age, all wan as if he was own flesh an' blood."

"Say no more about it, honest woman, but make your mind aisy about the *pástheen beg*. Sure, he can have the run ov the place wid my own childher, an' get the same bit an' sup they get thimselves. Say no more about it."

Matters having been thus arranged satisfactorily between them, the farmer deferred his work to another day; and getting ready his horse and cart, went off to town with the money Oonagh gave him to bring back the coffins. When he was gone she went again to the poor cabin where lay the remains of those she loved so well, and though she wept over them once more, her tears had none of the old passion and bitterness in them. The resolution she had come to of adopting their child had taken all the sting out of her sorrow, and given her an unspeakable comfort that on the previous evening she could not have imagined possible. It was not that she loved the ill-fated pair less now than she had done then, or felt less pity for their sad lives and miserable deaths, but another and an intensely human interest had arisen to fill up the void in

her life, and arouse her from a grief that must now give place to duty—a duty not the less imperious and binding because it was self imposed. There was a way now by which she could prove her great love for the dead, the very way they would themselves have chosen, and pointed out to her, had the choice or opportunity been given to them. Their child should be hers henceforth, and she would love him as she had loved them, but with a more sacred and unselfish love.

By-and-by, when Sally had time she came and sat with her, and the nurse sent by the Rector, and the other women, so that she was not left any more alone with the dead.

She had also the satisfaction—and a great one it was to the simple girl—of having the *keen* cried over her beloved dead. Without this mark of affectionate respect, she would have thought proper honour was not paid to their memory. It was a wretched wake, held in a wretched place, but the death-cry should not be wanting there. And as it rose and fell, at intervals throughout the night, Oonagh found a sad comfort in thinking that though they had died poor, yet that the *keen* was cried over them, as it had been cried over all “their people!”

CHAPTER XX.

OONAGH BEGINS ANOTHER LIFE.

I hold it truth with him who sings
To one dear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones,
Of their own selves to higher things.

TENNYSON.

NEXT morning the funeral took place. The churchyard, where the grave had been dug, was not more than a mile away, so that the farmer's strong horse was able to draw the two coffins laid in the cart, side by side. They were cheap coffins of painted deal, but they were not *poor-house coffins*, or paid for by *charity*, but by her own money, and this thought was one of very great comfort to Oonagh. The farmer walked at the horse's head, and his wife with the nurse, and a few other people came after the cart with Oonagh. She held the child in her arms, for she had the idea that young as he was, it was right and fitting that he should follow the remains

of his parents to their last resting-place, and that in after life when he would be told that he had done so, he would feel pleased and gratified by the knowledge.

This double funeral, in its great poverty and simplicity, was in truth a melancholy spectacle as it went slowly along to the country graveyard, that lay on the sunny side of a rather steep hill. It excited, however, no surprise in the minds of the people who met it on the way; for scenes like it were becoming so common in the country, owing to the universal poverty and distress, that they had ceased to elicit any special notice. All those whom they met joined them, according to the invariable Irish custom; and by the time they had reached their destination there were many persons following the coffins. This was fortunate, as they helped the farmer to carry the remains to the grave without requiring any assistance from the women. Oonagh stood by with the child while the two coffins were lowered into one grave, and laid one over the other. "They had loved in their lives, and in death they were not divided." She wept very bitterly, as did many of those present, for it would have been indeed a hard heart that could see unmoved so sad a sight, even though it was one that was unfortunately no

longer rare. Oonagh grieved too, that they were not brought to rest with "their people," but it was not possible to have it so. The family burial-place of both was fully twenty miles away, and her limited funds could by no arithmetical feat be made to accomplish the expense of sending them there. She wisely considered also, that even if she had the money, it would be much better spent in caring for the living child, than in burying the dead parents in one place, instead of another. They lay at rest *together*, that was enough, and she silently made a resolution that as soon as she could afford it, she would place a memorial stone over the grave, so that in after-time their son would know where his unfortunate parents were lying in one grave.

Oonagh remained one night with Sally, to recruit her strength before going back to her mistress, as her return journey was also to be made on foot. On examining her little purse she found that after paying the funeral expenses—not a great deal in reality, but a great deal to her just then—she had only twenty-five shillings left. She gave a pound of this to her host, as her first instalment of what he was to get in payment of the child's board, and the other five shillings to Sally to buy some decent clothes for him, instead of the dirty rags he had on. Five

shillings was not a great deal; but a little mite like him did not want much in the country, and Sally promised that she would make the money go very far, and add something to it "unknown to himself."

After breakfast next morning she took a loving leave of the unconscious child, whom already she loved very dearly, weeping over him, and begging the Father of the orphan to protect and guard him. Then she said good-bye to the farmer, and after thanking him warmly for his kindness, she set out on her long solitary walk. The good-hearted Sally accompanied her for a mile of the way, for as short as was their acquaintance, those two good women had become fast friends.

"An' you have no call to be onaisy about little Johnny," said Sally as they were parting. "I give you hand an' word, as a Christhen woman, that I'll dale by him as I'll dale by my own childher. I can't go farther than that."

"An' I'll ax no more from you," replied Oonagh. "Let him take his share wid your own little ones, an' run in an' out wid 'em. His poor mother will be lookin' down on you from Heaven, an' when she sees how good you are to him, she'll be prayin' for you an' your childher. In three months now I'll get lave, I'm sure, to come again for a night. My wages'll

be risin', an' I'll have more money then to bring to the man ov the house. He'll trust me till then, for he knows by this, that I'm an honest woman that will let no wan be at any loss by me while I have health an' strength to work."

"Don't think very bad ov him intirely, for taking the money for Johnny out ov your hard airnin's," said the loyal wife, in a tone that was half deprecatory, and half ashamed. "'Tis a near mane thing I own, but his rint is fallin' due, an' the times is very bad. His own family is risin' up round him, an' he has to work hard to keep the farm goin' on, an' the roof over our heads. But I'm sure ov wan thing, an' that is, now that the bargain is made betune ye, an' that he knows he won't be at any loss by having little Johnny, he'll be fond ov him, an' make no differ betune him an' his own childher. He's a close-fisted man is Jim, an' sure 'tis that he wants to be, wid his long family, an' none ov 'em old enough to be any help to him; but still an' all, he's not bad-hearted at all, an' he'd do a neighbour a good turn, if he was not to be at all at a loss. Jim's bark is worse than his bite any day."

"I'm sure ov that, for I saw a dale ov good nature an' feelin' in him, barrin' where the money was concerned. I don't blame him at all for bein' a thrifle

near. Sure 'tis only right an' fair that the honest man would think ov his own family first ov all, an' it would be well for many people if they had as much sinse as what he has."

They parted as affectionately as if they had been sisters. Sally turned back again towards her home, and Oonagh pursued her solitary journey, the hood of her cloak drawn over her head, and her shoes and stockings in the basket she carried in her hand. She did not walk as briskly now, as she had done two days before, for her heart was very heavy. In those two days she had gone through much suffering both of mind and body, and it had left its impress on her sad face, and in her slow and languid walk. But if her heart was heavy, her purse was light, for all that was now in it was a few coppers and her thimble!

She was received on her arrival at Mrs. Mulhall's very kindly by that good woman, who told her over and over that she was heartily welcome, and who listened with much interest to the account Oonagh gave her, of what had happened to her during the short period of her absence.

"Musha, but you put a great load on your back, *asthore machree*, when you took the care ov any wan's child," she said gravely, when she had heard Oonagh's story.

"So itself. I couldn't let him be sint to the workhouse, the last ov all places, that, 'a *vanithee*, is the short an' the long ov it. I'd never have a day's pace, or a night's sleep, if he was there, but I'd be always thinkin' ov him, an' breakin' my heart about him. Oh! if you saw him, the fair-haired little darlin'! you wouldn't be surprised. He threw his little arms round my neck when he seen me, the very same way that his mother done, when I walked into her, tired an' hungry, an' without house or home. If you wor in my place you'd just do the very same."

"Maybe so."

"It isn't maybe so at all, but you'd do it out an' out, you're the very woman that would. Any wōman would do it, barrin' she was some Turk, or outlandish haythen from forrin' parts. An' what odds does it make? I have my health, an' I'm able to work for him along wid myself. I'm alone in the world, an' the good God sent this *pástheen beg* to give me something to love an' care for. No wan has any right to rise up to me, an' say that I was spindin' on him, what they had a better right to. He *is* a great care surely, but for all that, I'm not sorry for takin' it on my back, an' if it was to be done over

again, I'd do it all the same; and so would you too," said Oonagh with a faint smile.

"Women is very foolish surely, an' I suppose I wouldn't have more sinse than the rest; but now that 'tis done, you will have to stand by it. But God fits the back for the burden, ever an' always, an' He'll help you in the good work that you took in hand. Sure we'll all help you. It will bring down a blessin' on you, an' moreover, make you very thankful to yourself, when you are lying on your death-bed."

Mrs. Mulhall was as good as her word. Many a little present she gave Oonagh from that time, that was very useful and acceptable, and enabled her to spare her own money. Now, it was a petticoat cut off the piece of home-made flannel when it came from the weavers, and again, it would be a large ball of woollen yarn, to knit into stockings for herself during the long winter evenings, when her day's work was done. But Oonagh now never indulged in the luxury of wearing shoes and stockings, but on Sundays and holydays, when she went to mass, or was sent by her mistress on an errand to the next town. Up to this, she had always dressed very well for her station in life, for she was young, and well aware that she was

very handsome ; what girl that is, can be ever quite insensible to the value of dress as an accessory to beauty ? She had always worn smart clothes neatly made, and becomingly put on, and often treated herself to a bright-coloured silk necktie, or a pretty-patterned print dress, to wear going to mass. But all those little harmless vanities were now discarded for ever. She wore her clothes until they could be no longer mended, and when she had perforce to replace them, the bright colours and slight materials were put aside, and nothing was bought but what was dark and durable. If she ever felt herself tempted to buy anything because it looked pretty, and would become her, or that she did not absolutely require, she put by that temptation at once, considering that it was a robbery of what belonged to the child, more than to herself. Her whole life was changed, and all its aims, projects, and hopes were turned into a new channel. She became in a great measure a miser, hoarding up coppers until she could convert them into shillings, and again shillings until she could make them pounds. She denied herself everything that was not of the most absolute necessity. She allowed herself no recreation ; but worked on untiringly, cheered and animated by the thought that quarter-day was coming

round, when she would be paid her wages. But little of that money was for herself; it was all, or nearly all, for Johnny, to pay for his board at the farm-house, and keep him comfortably clothed. She did not care how hard was her work, or how poor were her own clothes, provided that all was well with him.

The only variety in her life, the only recreation she ever required, was to get leave of absence now and then for twenty-four hours, to make Johnny a visit, and pay the farmer for his board. The widow was very indulgent to her in this respect, never grumbling at the inconvenience to herself; for, besides being a naturally good woman, she was sensible enough to know that a good servant deserves a good mistress, and is none the worse for a little judicious kindness.

The little fellow was taught by Sally to call Oonagh "Auntie," and soon learned to know and love her, and look forward to seeing her as the great happiness of his life, the one bright spot that he was always to have in view. When she came, she was sure to bring apples, or gingerbread, or a stick of candy, which he was told to divide impartially with the other children; and if she had a few pennies in her pocket, they also were divided fairly, with the delightful permission that each should do with his penny

as he pleased himself. It was no wonder that her visits at the farm were seasons of rejoicing, and that from Jim, who got what was due to him, down to the smallest child who got his penny, all were glad to see her, and give her a hearty and uproarious welcome.

And when Oonagh felt the child's soft little arms round her neck, and his head laid to rest on her bosom, she felt herself more than repaid for all her self-denial, and happier than she had ever thought she could be again. As Sally had promised, there was no difference whatever made between Johnny and the other children; he got the same food, and was treated like them in every way; the only difference was, that though they were often slapped when they deserved it, he never was. "Whin his father an' mother wor gone, why should any wan raise a hand to the poor little crayther?" was the motto of Jim and Sally, whenever they were told that the child was naughty, and required correction. He was a handsome boy, and Oonagh's heart yearned to him more and more, as she saw how like his father he grew day after day. But the resemblance was only in outward appearance, for little Johnny was a grave retiring child, with none of the forward swagger and plausible volubility that had been John Molloy's

chief characteristics, and which in the eyes of the poor simple girl, had been his great attractions. The child, though not sickly, was very far from being robust, and in any other hands would be a pining, wretched creature, whose existence would have been no pleasure to himself, and a source of grief and trouble to all around him. But under Sally's care, and in a wholesome country place where he was well fed, he gained a fair share of health, and developed an amount of intelligence that was far beyond that shown by the other children, who all so greatly exceeded him in health and strength. Nature, the kindest of all mothers, is abundant in compensations, and if sometimes she withholds with one hand, it is only to give still more liberally with the other. She had dealt in this way with little Johnny, for if she had been sparing of her gifts of health and strength, she had dowered his intellect with no niggard hand.

As time went on, Oonagh, woman-like, became more and more attached to the child of her adoption, for whose sake she toiled and slaved, and put aside all the enjoyment of her youth, and all consciousness of her beauty, long before she had attained the age when woman is in her prime. He was a heavy care on her mind, a great tax on her slender resources; but

her great love made nothing of all that. She had loved him first for his parents' sake, and because of the instinct of motherhood that most women possess in a greater or lesser degree. All the pity of her soul had gone out to him—forlorn and orphaned as he was—on the morning when he had flung his arms round her neck, and nestled his head on her bosom, as if led by some subtle instinct to appeal to her for protection and love. But soon she learned to love him for himself, he was so handsome, so affectionate and gentle. The sense of protection, the knowledge that to one living creature she was absolutely necessary, and above all the goodness, the perfect unselfishness of her own nature; these all combined, made her yoke easy, and her burden light. Before very long, it had ceased to be any burden at all. She devoted herself to this child, not only willingly and cheerfully, but with her whole heart and soul, until the thought of him, the care for him, became almost second nature. She worked on day after day, through winter's cold and summer's heat, with a patient self-denial that looked for no reward but the consciousness that she was keeping the promise made to the dead, and that owing to her toil the boy was well, and kindly cared for. Her youth, with all its gladness and elasticity, passed away from her in the dull round of incessant

labour; but she let it go without a sigh. The harmless little vanities of a pretty girl were dead within her heart, which was now chiefly employed in solving the very difficult problem, of how three shillings could be made to go as far as five. And everything considered, she did pretty well. Not only was she able to pay for the child punctually, and keep him and herself in coarse but comfortable clothing, but she also managed to make a little present to Sally, or one of her children occasionally, just to show that she appreciated her kindness to Johnny, and was not ungrateful for it.

In a little time she found, to her great surprise, that she had some small surplus at the end of every quarter. It might be sometimes a few pence only, and sometimes a few shillings. These were carefully put by until they mounted up to a couple of pounds. This little hoard she was determined never to encroach upon, but leave it to accumulate by the addition of more pennies and shillings, until it should amount to a sum large enough to lodge in the savings-bank, with the twenty pounds that had remained to her after the sale of her father's land, and the payment of all his debts, and which she had never touched. It was but a small thing to lean on, yet now it became of great value in her eyes. After all it was but a trifle, very contemptible no doubt in the opinion of people who

are very rich; but she had put it together by hard work, and much self-sacrifice, and the thought that she had it, and could draw upon it in case of sickness, or any future emergency, made her heart feel very light and happy.

END OF VOL. II.



